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BERNADETTE

of Lourdes

BY

MARGARET GRAY BLANTON

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BERNADETTE OF LOURDES

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BERNADETTE OF LOURDES



Bernadette Soubirous

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

One hears of writers who have had an embarrassment of riches from which to work. Such was the fortune of this author. During the lifetime of Bernadette Soubirous exhaustive records had been made; she herself had testified before the Bishop's Commission to her every deed and thought, and all who had been connected with her had told all that they knew as well.

Thus in writing this book nothing has been added. It has been necessary to guess nothing, not even the smallest detail. If the night were clear and cold or the stones sharp, it had been so testified. If she thought, or he wished, or they believed, it had been so testified. On the whole it was a question of selection, and of a point of approach.

The author has meticulously refrained from passing judgment even by indirection. It is not the business of a biographer to say what Bernadette saw, only what she believed and reported that she saw. After this passage of time, and with only the lay examinations to judge by, it cannot be said with certainty what was her mental state during the apparitions. At any rate a biographer is an interpreter rather than a judge.

Lourdes and the healings at Lourdes are such subjects of controversy that one is inevitably expected to have either a "Protestant" or a "Catholic" viewpoint. The author was reared in a Protestant home and keeps her

Protestant affiliations. But although a point of approach is necessary, a viewpoint in the ordinary sense of the word is not : neither Catholic nor Protestant. One sees in Bernadette, to be sure, Catholic history in the making. But a medieval spirit in a little modern body, she belongs neither to one organization nor to one time or place. Bernadette by all the canons of human drama is universal.

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PART I
THE CANTICLE OF BERNADETTE

1

At last the White Train was ready to start. It was August the 17th ; the French National Pilgrimage had begun.

Eighteen trains were leaving Paris that night for Lourdes in the High Pyrenees, but of all the eighteen, the White Train was the most dramatic and the most terrifying, for it carried the most desperate of the pilgrims : the sickest, the dying.

Yet for all the tragic plight of the very ill there was no strained air of sadness ; all was gaiety, all hopefulness, for these people hoped and believed that before the great altar of Lourdes a miracle might happen, and that some of those who went down utterly spent might come back radiant with health.

To the White Train, so called because the tickets for it were white, the Fathers who had organized the pilgrimage assigned the very ill, since it alone carried nurses and doctors. In addition to the regular compartment coaches of a second or third class train, it carried coaches in which stretchers could be placed and food cars, for the trip required seventeen to eighteen hours.

Each coach was marked with the name of a saint.

Each person wore his coveted white ticket, but on the breasts of the sickest there also were white, heart-shaped tags that marked them for special attention and consideration.

The platform at the Austerlitz Station was a busy place. Stretcher-bearers worked their way through the crowds, pushing chairs or carrying stretchers or boxes into which the chronic and helpless ill had been placed — all too much like coffins with no lids! There were relatives and friends of the ill. There were vendors to supply their wants. And there were priests, monks and nuns acting as counselors or nurses. The sisters in charge were in black with white coifs, but many sisters in blue had come down to see the train off. They were young or old, pretty or ugly, stolid or laughing with excitement. They wore aprons and carried jugs or pillows, and the general paraphernalia of practical nursing.

And the priests and the monks were young or old, handsome or homely, thin or fat, bearded or clean shaven, with cassocks and belts, but very agile and masculine in spite of their skirts. And amidst the piles of pillows and racks of water jugs they stood laughing and talking, reassuring relatives, dropping papers, picking them up again, and being photographed by admirers just a bit sheepishly.

It was all as if they were engaged in some very commonplace business instead of the incomprehensible one of going down to Lourdes perhaps to see a miracle.

At last the train gave its shrill little whistle, and amidst the banging of doors began slowly to pull out. The sisters and the priests, and the pilgrims who were able to stand, stood at the windows and began to sing. Their voices came thinly over the gathering clatter of the coaches for they were singing the "Canticle of Berna-

dette" in the high reed-like voices of people under a great strain.

Paris was left behind and the train full of pitiful suffering and astonishing hope settled down to a night of pain and prayer. With all the extra trains to be cared for, progress was slow, with long weary pauses in stations and on sidings. But the magic of the moonlit countryside was always just outside the windows and the crickets' chirp was louder than the rattle and shunting of the trains.

Etampes, Orléans, Blois, Tours. Bits of sleep broken by sighs, by the whispers of the sisters in attendance, by the knowledge that a woman was dying in the next coach.

Châtellerault, Poitiers, Angoulême. Sixty thousand people on their way to Lourdes to pray before the altar of the Blessed Virgin! Montmoreau, Bordeaux. And a million people a year, the greatest pilgrimage of all times, greater by far than all three of the Crusades of the Middle Ages, going to Lourdes to pray. They are not led there by Louis of France, nor by Richard the Lion-Hearted, nor by Bernard of Vézelay, but by a pitifully fragile, tuberculous little girl of fourteen. There in 1858 she knelt in front of the grotto in an ancient rock and prayed with the tiny apparition of a girl in white who stood with her rose-decorated feet on a bush of the wild eglantine and ran her rosary through her fingers.

Then sleep, and the morning.

There are scarcely any foothills to the Pyrenees. Suddenly, out of rolling country, black cloud-shrouded mountains rise, and beyond them other black cloud-shrouded mountains. There are roaring, rapid little streams and dark, ancient woods, and strange, peaceful little villages with crumbling walls, and patches of corn wound round with white morning-glories.

The train was nearing Lourdes. The sun hardly shone on the valleys yet. As the train pulled through a gorge and around a curve, there across the swift river Gave du Pau shone the basilica with its background of mountains, and, in the foreground, the river and Grotto of the Ancient Rock, the Massabielle — the sacred Grotto of Bernadette.

In the little mountain town the shadows are long, and the glacial waters of the Gave du Pau run swiftly through the bottom of the valley in a great sweeping horseshoe. The town lies in the shadow of the surrounding mountains and of an ancient fortified castle.

This fort commands seven valleys which converge here. It rests on a fortress site which since Roman days has had a written history, for the Pyrenees are on the border between France and Spain. Narrow, winding streets follow the contour of the mountain-side and of the walls, outer ditches and ramparts of the fort.

One of these streets, the Petits-Fossés, takes its name from the narrow outer ditch. In this street is the house from which the little fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous went across to the far banks of the Gave under the shadow of the ancient rock of the Massabielle to a grotto where she beheld the apparition of the Blessed Virgin. In 1858 the far bank was wild, common land belonging to the town. On it stood but a single house — a mill.

But the far side of the river is no longer wild and the garrison of the ancient fort is gone and the fort itself houses a museum.

With the arrival of the pilgrimage trains the railway station is a scene of orderly confusion. The enormous trains continually disgorge their loads of chair or stretcher cases, or their ambulatory cases, and hosts of pilgrims, both sick and well who have come from all parts of the Catholic world.

The narrow, winding streets are packed from curb to curb. Singly or in small groups, or in marching and singing bodies come women's organizations, mixed groups or enormous delegations of men. Banners fly — lions rampant or fleurs-de-lis, or the crowned Virgin on a thin new moon. And all sing the songs of their regions or the "Canticle of Bernadette."

The town, running down hill to the river and on across to the grotto is lined with open shops selling little mementos of Lourdes, for each pilgrim must have a medal or two, a tiny rose molded in silver or gold, a music-box that plays the Canticle, or a small glass bottle in the form of the Blessed Virgin with a crown-shaped stopper. The wares are mostly bright and cheap. The shops are cosmopolitan:

JULIE NICOLAU
AU SACRÉ CŒUR DE JÉSUS
ENGLISH SPOKEN
MAN SPRICHT DEUTSCH
SE HABLA ESPAÑOL
SI PARLA ITALIANO

Despite the surging crowds, at least some of the ordinary business of the town proceeds as usual. Perhaps a street will be cleared for a great flock of Roman-nosed sheep to be driven through. Busses and cars push their way at a snail's pace, some carrying the sick or an overflowing load of stretcher-bearers to the station or to the grotto. And one may see great lines of wheeled stretchers, covered from the sun, in which the very sick are taken down hill to the great plaza.

As the sun rises higher the heat increases. The baked dust of the streets rises with the cries of the shopkeepers and the babble of many languages and dialects.

And over all may be heard the "Canticle of Bernadette": simple words set to a folk melody which has become so much a part of Lourdes that during one's entire stay, waking or sleeping, it rings in one's ears. It echoes in the rumble of the busses or the clatter of hucksters. It sings itself to the echoing footsteps of late Mass-goers, and to the dim early scraping of stretcher wheels over cobblestones. It is, indeed, the very essence of Lourdes.

Then the edge of the grounds is reached: the sacred precincts, many city blocks square. And the shops are forgotten. The hurrying and sober crowd surges across the entrance of the Domain into the shelter of the enormous curved ramps which lead to the upper churches, supported by huge stone arches and flung like great protecting wings around the "Square of the Rosary."

The churches that give the impression of being one,

are in reality three. On the level of the Square is an edifice with flanking outdoor altars and massive steps that serve as the place for the great services. On a higher level is the second one, which is in fact the crypt of the still higher church, the Gothic-styled Basilica, so high and so dramatically placed on top of the Massabielle.

But Lourdes is not a place ; it is an emotion. It cannot be described in terms of stone or marble or concrete or its works of art. It can only be described in terms of the pulsing, crushing crowds, marching and singing and utterly intent on the spiritual experiences which they are undergoing.

Meanwhile out of the Hospices the sick have come on rolling stretchers, chairs, crutches. Out of hotels, cellars and garrets pilgrims have come, and from surrounding villages and farms. French from Paris and from the provinces ; French with the Creole coloring of the natives of Martinique, or French with the black skins of the African colonials. The costumes of monks, priests, nuns, mingle with the head-dresses of all France and the modern clothing of all the world.

But there is no circus spirit in this crowd. Faces are sober. Neither is there a look of impending hysteria. All is done in order and decency but with the intensity of people who are there to ask a miracle of God either in the curing of the sick or in the resurrection of their own faith.

Long before breakfast the sick have been taken before the altar in the Sacred Grotto. Mass is said for them there, and then breakfast is served from portable kitchens. This care of the ill is taken by an organization known as the Hospitality, which has charge of the carrying, nursing and handling of all the sick that come to Lourdes on organized pilgrimages. Its members are

known as the "Servants of the Sick" : the women act as nurses, the men as brancardiers or stretcher-bearers.

This interesting and devout organization plays an important part in the psychology of Lourdes. One day in August, 1880, the Vicomte de Roussy de Sales offered to help an invalid to be lifted from the train. As he drew her little wheeled stretcher box in the direction of the Grotto, he crossed the Place Marcadal where he called to two friends to help him. Out of this grew the Hospitality.

Devout Catholic men and women from the whole world are members of this organization. It is peculiarly democratic ; princes, merchants, workers, ranking inside it without regard to their rank in the world at large. For them no task is too difficult or too menial and surely it must often require a high degree of devotion for many of these immaculate and delicately reared men and women to care for the most distressing and often shocking cases of disease. As they push the stretchers or the chairs or carts of the sick around the streets there is a constant murmur of devout but unostentatious prayer. The women of the Hospitality wear distinguishing head-dresses and medals ; the men, armbands and shoulder straps, into the ends of which they catch the poles of the stretchers. They are very picturesque and add greatly to the dramatic effect, but if they are conscious of this they conceal it very well indeed, for their bearing is simple, workaday, and unassuming.

It is the brancardiers who take the sick on the carts when after breakfast the slow movement to the baths begins. The water of the sacred spring has been piped to an adjoining space where a row of small bath-houses has been arranged inside a fenced-off court. Each bath — there are four for women and children and three for

men — is in a cubicle at the rear of a dressing-room. The sick are admitted by numbers given them previously at the Hospice and are quickly undressed by the aides. If they cannot help themselves they are assisted into the baths.

The water is quickly put over them and they are given a statue of the Virgin to kiss while the Credo is being said. They are then removed, re-dressed and carried out. It is all very simply and quickly done and hundreds go through this routine daily. The atmosphere is both devout and practical.

Outside, in the enclosure partly shaded by the trees, kneel priests praying with outstretched arms. And the people along the iron fence, massed and swaying, faces white with tension, respond.

As the sun gets higher and the baked earth reflects the heat, the people move slowly from one place to another. Every available space in all the churches is taken. But to kneel where Bernadette had knelt in front of the grotto is the greatest desire of all. Long lines, four abreast, wait to file into the tiny cave, now become an altar. Inside the grotto there is a myriad of candles, and one hears the chanting and prayers of worshippers.

The face of the surrounding cliff is covered with a spiderweb of crutches and at the base there is a pool-like container for votive flowers. The cliff alongside, where Bernadette saw the Virgin stand, is covered with quaint little bouquets in round tight bundles. And in an overtone comes the dim roar of the hidden millrace and the rushing water of the mountain stream.

By three o'clock the crowd of pilgrims is surging back to the enormous outdoor church — the Square of the Rosary. The long esplanade is lined with thousands of people. As many as forty thousand may line the outer

edges alone without crowding, but the average number during the pilgrimages is between twenty-five and thirty thousand.

On a gray and misty afternoon the mountains in the background have wisps of fog upon their sides. And there is, whether clear or cloudy, always a consciousness of the mountains so very high and so very close.

The sick are placed at the front of the crowd, five, six, seven lines deep. There are children with birth injuries. There are heart cases with panting breath. Faces scarred from disease and burns. Blind, paralytic. Many of them have the very breath of death upon them, but all hope for the intervention of the Blessed Virgin.

The procession forms at the altar in the grotto where a brief service is said. Then visiting clergy, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, as well as the most humble, form in line. The chanting begins in unison :

Lauda Sion Salvatorem,
Lauda ducem et pastorem
In hymnis et canticis.

Loud-speakers amplify the voices and carry them to the far spaces of the esplanade. The enormous throng joins in. Even from the distant fortress, it can be heard with perfect clearness. This amplified singing in unison of the same song over and over again has a peculiarly elated quality.

Belated stretcher-bearers, carrying the sick who have just come from the bathing pools, hasten across the space to find places for their charges before the procession of the Blessed Sacrament begins. Soon the procession makes its way along the edge of the river, concealed from the waiting crowds by one of the great ramps.

It is first visible only as floating banners over the bowed heads of the massed worshippers.

Then into view comes the first long line, four abreast, of the organization of young girls known as the Daughters of Mary. They are veiled in white and their pretty, solemn little faces are exalted. They pass up the steps of the Basilica and line the parapet, the steps and the platform with their silken, yellow-gold banners.

Group after group follows them : pilgrims from all parts of France and, indeed, of the world. Bent old men, toil-worn and unshaven ; young men ; men with Prince Albert coats ; men in cutaway coats and striped trousers ; sailors bearing models of boats ; Senegalese soldiers black as soot with short kinky hair ; they fill the steps and the available spaces before the church door. Then come the monks : Benedictines in white ; Franciscans in brown cowls and robes and with cords about the waist ; monks in black gowns. Then the golden cross appears, held high by a monk flanked by two acolytes bearing long candles. Then the *Salutation Angélique* :

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women!"

The thurifers carry censers in front of the group of high church dignitaries in brilliant colored robes, half-covered with priceless laces and embroideries. These are the bearers and escort of the monstrance, the great gold and jeweled vessel in which the Host is carried. This exquisite work of the goldsmith's art catches the light of the sun which flashes along the golden rays that extend from it. Covering all is a great silken canopy. Behind this walk the attending bishop and the visiting clergy.

As the procession of the Blessed Sacrament enters the great square surrounded by the sick and the pilgrims,

prayers and acclamations arise from kneeling priests and from the throng :

"Seigneur, nous vous adorons,

(Lord, we adore thee.)

"Vous êtes le Christ, Fils du Dieu vivant,

(Thou art the Christ, Son of the living God.)

"Hosanna, hosanna, au Fils de David.

(Hosanna to the Son of David.)

"Save us," repeat the pilgrims, "or we perish."

"Lord, make us see," say the blind.

"Lord, make us walk," say the helpless.

"Mary, Mother of God, be merciful to us."

"Saint Bernadette, pray for us."

And all the sick with passionate voices cry or whisper :

"Saint Bernadette, pray for us !"

And as the bishop passes the lines of the sick he pauses before each one, lifts high the Host and gives the blessing. The eyes of the hopeless fill with hope and follow until it is no longer possible for them to see. "Perhaps," they are thinking, "it will be we who are blessed this day, perhaps suddenly we will be healed."

But there is no sign of hysteria in this crowd. If one should believe he is healed, he does not cry out and attempt to follow the procession as was once the custom. After the blessing has been given and the music ends, then he may say to his attendant what he thinks has occurred to him. But he, with all the rest, the exalted or the weary, the tired or the refreshed, goes slowly through the enormous throng, back to his hospital.

The tension is broken. The stretcher-bearers and the chair attendants begin to take away the sick. The crowd breaks up rapidly, jostling to get away, while

the ambulances with the sick honk their way through the crowd until one is reminded of the wounded being cleared from some great battlefield.

The sun sets and the fortress darkens. The wind along the river is suddenly cold. The illumination flashes on. The great dark mass of the churches is outlined in light from the long rays of focussed spotlights. On a distant mountain is the outline of a cross. The procession of the *flambeaux* is about to begin. And now from all the town comes the hum of one single melody : the "Canticle of Bernadette."

It is an astonishing song, of no particular value as music, and with poor rhyming, inevitably, in many of its sixty verses. It tells brokenly the story of Bernadette ; of how she went to the grotto, of how the Virgin appeared to her, of how she found the spring. At the end of each four short lines comes the refrain "Avé, Avé, Avé, Maria." It was written by Gagnet and was first published in 1874. But though it is commonplace, it is so much a part of Lourdes that one line of it sung or whistled brings back with startling fidelity the contrasting heat of day and cold of night, the faces, the sounds, the smells, the whole sense of movement, and the feeling of perfect content in the pilgrims.

The night procession forms in two's and four's, carrying candles protected with little paper shades on which are written a few verses of the Canticle and through which the light shines. Deputations marching together carry cardboard lanterns with the names of their cities or sections. It is like a roll-call of France : Bordeaux, Toulouse, Angoulême, Marseilles, Avignon, Rheims, Amiens, Auxerre. Nuns, monks, prelates, old men and women, adolescents, children — all ages from the very old to the very young — they march and they sing.

Through the amplifier again comes the strong voice of a man :

"L'heure était venue," it starts.

The sweet hour is ringing
The bells bid us pray ;
The voices of Heaven
Announce the Avé.

And the chorus of the marching throng sings the refrain :

Avé, Avé, Avé, Maria,
Avé, Avé, Avé, Maria.

Up and down the great dark valleys the song pours for two hours without ceasing, and echoes from the hill of the Calvary to the hill of the old fortress, now silhouetted in cold black against the brilliant moon.

The sweet hour is ringing
The bells bid us pray ;
The voices of Heaven,
Announce the Avé.

Avé, Avé, Avé, Maria,
Avé, Avé, Avé, Maria.

The angel so gentle
Leads forth the sweet child
Bernadé so little !
The torrent so wild !

On Massabiellé
Her eyes, from afar,
Entranced are proclaiming
The Bright Morning Star.

The face, perfect sweetness,
The radiant grace
The love past believing
Our Lady's dear face.

Her dress is a lily
Immortal of hue,
Her girdle's a wisp of
The heaven so blue.

Her sandal a rose is
Of gold without price,
But newly unfolded
In sweet Paradise.

Her beads for the prayers
Show through fingers the way,
And teach the dear lesson
To earth-bound to pray.

Oh ! sweet hour of dawning,
The watching heart seems
In deep sighs revealing
The exquisite dreams.

(Bernadette speaks :)
Her beauty so perfect
My eyes would behold ;
Perhaps what she wishes
Her lips will unfold.

Oh Lady, dear Lady !
Oh ! what dost thou seek ?
Pray speak, I beseech Thee,
Pray speak, oh pray speak !

(The Lady speaks :)
The yonder deep-hid spring
Make straightway to start !
Its waters of healing
Come fresh from my heart.

Oh ! Fountain of Living
The future portend
Of blessed life giving
To sick without end !

Salute this wide valley
Of love the great throne,
For Mary Immaculate
Claims it her own !

Presently the singing will be finished. The exhausted people will disband and go to their temporary quarters. But not yet to sleep, for late into the night they will go up and down the steep streets of the town from midnight Mass at the high altar. Until toward morning in the cold penetrating air of the mountains, quiet lies on this amazing little town, and the sick and the desolate sleep and dream of going away with bright healthy faces and faith restored.

PART II

THE APPARITIONS

1

Although the more accessible valleys were known, the greater part of the Pyrenees was not even explored until after the period in which lay the life of Bernadette Soubirous and the establishment of Lourdes as a shrine.

At that time the timber had not been taken from the hills ; wolves and bears were to be seen, and wild boars were common. Except on donkey-trails, the mountains between France and Spain could not be crossed. These mountains are abrupt, and great stone escarpments threaten the precipitous paths. On the Spanish side, the climate is arid and sunbaked, while on the northern slope there is much moisture and vegetation. Into the little cups of earth, an occasional shepherd farmer has built a wooden chalet. Where the ground will support it, there may cluster a little village. The ever-present threat of avalanche as well as the smallness of the footholds makes for a very compact sort of living. The stalls for the cattle adjoin the kitchen-living-room, and a large window between the two permits a pleasant chumminess with the large head of a cow or mule.

In moister places, the shepherds in those days walked around on high stilts and, in the interval of moving about, propped themselves up on a third stick, drew

wool from a shoulder-sack, and knitted. Much of the life has a strong Basque flavor from over the mountains in Spain. The Basque beret is still the almost universal head-dress of the men. They are a hardy race ; small, compact, muscular, dark ; neither the fierce heat of the mountains' summer mid-day nor the cold of the glaciers can discomfit them. The Béarnais of this section speak a dialect midway between French and Spanish, and they have the proverbially salty tongue. A jest or a *bon mot* is greeted with appreciation. They are genial and home loving ; shrewd at driving a bargain, but honest in keeping it. Their minds, although lazy, are keen, and D'Angla, the police sergeant who played an important rôle in Bernadette's life at the time of the apparitions, said in writing of these people that they endeavor to avoid hell, rather than to gain heaven. Their greatest interest is indeed religion ; they love the miraculous and all the pomp and glitter of ceremony. Their art, even in the churches, has a rich Spanish quality entirely lacking in austerity.

At the time of the apparitions, in 1858, Lourdes was small and there was surely little amusement there, but it was not the other-worldly little place that romanticizing authors would have us believe. The Lourdes of that time has been pictured by many writers as an entirely unsophisticated country village whose population had no interest other than in going to church, or perhaps in herding sheep. But this was hardly likely, for the section was the center of baths and summer resorts. All summer long fine people passed through Lourdes in carriages or stopped to rest in the quiet square which even at that time had its esplanade.

Lourdes is situated at the western end of the immense Pyrenean chain. Roads lead from it to Bagnères, to Luz,

to Cauterets, to Tarbes, to Pau. Beneath it, in a great horseshoe curve, runs the Gave du Pau, a stream fed from the waters of a glacier not far distant. To Lourdes, superb views are commonplace and before Bernadette's apparitions the steep little streets, if not very prosperous, were certainly very bustling.

But to all intents, the little town had no great future and a very precarious present. The main occupations were the working of freestone and of slate, the tending of the bi-weekly market, which brought into town the peasants of the district, with their cattle and smaller wares, and the maintenance of a garrison quartered in the ancient fort that stood as sentinel over the seven valleys. This fort was a link with the distant past, a link with Romans who worshipped Jupiter and Diana, and with the Crusaders who came along this valley on the way to Jerusalem. It had once been taken by the English under the Black Prince. It had sheltered the town since the early ages, as it sheltered now a garrison of the soldiers of Louis Napoleon and the Second Empire.

The neighborhood was not lacking in history. Bagneres-de-Bigorre was not far away. It had once received a visit from Madame de Maintenon, and its praises had even been sung by Montaigne. The town of Cauterets was closer still; a great gathering place both for invalids and for the well. Luz had its twelfth-century church built by the Knights Templars for defense, a fort-monastery that sheltered the Crusaders.

In the other direction Pau had seen its days of high culture. Marguerite d'Angoulême went there in 1527, and with her had gone Italian as well as French artists, writers, poets and historians. She had given shelter to John Calvin and to Clement Marot of the French Reformation, and they had so interested her daughter Jeanne

that she had made the section Protestant by an edict of 1562. Her son was Henry of Navarre, whom she brought up as a peasant in a castle only a few miles from Lourdes. Perhaps this effort to Protestantize the section is of much more importance than appears on the surface, for in this section Catholics are violently Catholic, just as people who have been deprived of their religious liberties are ever more vigorously on the defensive, even hundreds of years later.

Lourdes was very conscious of its own affairs and of its importance. On the feast day of the Assumption the magistrates were elected, and the magistrates, priests and people all appeared, rosary in hand. The day of the election of the Council, the magistrate designated not only the officers in the management of town affairs but even the common herders of the horses, of the kine, of the swine and even of the geese of the village. The common land of the town, the pasturage and pasture rights were arranged down to the last detail.

Lourdes was orderly. Lourdes was not run casually; it was arranged and managed, and when all was assigned, tied neatly into a little bundle with red tape. The entire populace was fitted into a little caste system and it was very bad luck, indeed, for anyone who tried to step out or around it.

Unfortunately, it was possible for families to step down, or rather to slip down, and this had happened to the family of Bernadette Soubirous which was not, in the year of 1858, even a borderline family. These little towns on the steep hillsides or in the fertile valleys were not without their bitter poverty. But the descent of the Soubirous family is a little hard to understand.

2

On a little stream called Lapaca, that comes down with such force through the town of Lourdes to meet the Gave du Pau at the foot of the fort, there were seven mills. One of these had belonged, before the Revolution, to a Monsieur de Boly, and had finally come into the possession of the Casterot family for certain rentals and the right to choose a pig each year from among those that were raised at the mills. Justin Casterot was left, upon the death of his wife, Claire Lavit, with a family of girls. His sister Antoinette brought them up like a mother. In 1841 Justin died and it was necessary, with several girls and no miller in the family, to look around for a suitable husband for Louise. Bernarde, the eldest sister, was married to an inn-keeper. Lucile had married Dominique Vignes. Louise was the one to marry a manager for the mill. She was only seventeen, of medium height, blonde and blue-eyed, well-behaved, proud, modest and devout. She was kindhearted too, and courteous.

The logical selection as a husband for her was François Soubrou. He came of a family of tenant millers, and was the son of Marie Dassis and Joseph Soubrou who had been a miller for Monsieur Latour. François was thirty-five, twice the age of Louise. He was an easy-going man, intelligent and kindly but a bit over-fond of sitting around in the bistro and the café. He carried his wine well, however, and although he loved it as much as did most of the citizens of Lourdes, he was never seen under its influence.

The civil ceremony of their marriage was celebrated on

November 19, 1842. François' mother, Marie Dassis, had died on the twenty-first of October, however, and it was therefore necessary to postpone the church celebration of the marriage until the period of mourning was passed. The celebration finally took place on January 9, 1843.

A year later, on January 7, 1844, on Sunday afternoon at two o'clock, their first child was born — a daughter. She was a very small but apparently healthy child, who cried a great deal, to the distress of her twelve-year-old cousin, who two days later, January 9, stood godfather to her. He was Jean-Marie Védère and was later to bring some honor to the family for bravery in battle. The child's godmother was her maternal Aunt Bernarde. The child was baptized by the Abbé Forgues and given the name of Marie-Bernarde, but she was called by the diminutive "Bernadette."

One might surely have prophesied for this baby an ordinary and uneventful life : warmth, food, comfort, a dot, marriage, children, old age and finally burial in the cemetery under the shadows of the fort, where her people lay.

In the month of July 1844, when Bernadette was only six months old, her mother realized that she was to have another child the early part of the following year. According to the custom of the district, a foster-mother was sought. In the nearby village of Bartres, Marie Laguës, born Marie Aravant, had lost her first baby when it was still less than two months old. Arrangements were made with her to take the baby girl of the Soubirous.

Her mother and her Aunt Bernarde took Bernadette to Bartres and her aunt remained for eight days with her until she had become accustomed to the new surround-

ings. She was described as a sweet, good-tempered baby, who displayed intelligence at even that early stage. She was already charming and the neighbors liked to see her and hold her in their arms. Marie Laguës was fond of Bernadette, and was to play an important part in her childhood.

On February 13, 1845, a boy, Jean, was born to the Soubirous, but he did not thrive. He lived a little less than two months. In October of that year Bernadette was returned to her family. She was twenty-one months old. On December 19, 1846, another child was born; a girl christened Toinette-Marie. She survived, and out-lived Bernadette a good many years.

Not a great deal is known of Bernadette's life on the stream of Lapaca and it is a little hard to reconstruct the mill section of Lourdes at the period of Bernadette's childhood. It has been built over, and the Lapaca today runs through a conduit. But to the right of the fort as it turns its back on the town and faces the river, there was a fairly deep ravine, down which ran the little mill-stream. Of the seven mills which ground the flour and corn of the small community, several are still standing. They are stalwart structures through one part of which runs the water that turns the wheels inside the houses. The mill-rooms, which must have been a very familiar sight to little Bernadette, are filled with wheels and troughs, and various pieces of equipment, superficially, at least, not unlike the equipment in the old water-mills in our own country. The mill-stream was crossed by little foot-bridges, but it was shallow enough to allow easy fording for horses and for carts. It must have been a very pretty, wild little stream around which the children played. The fort towered above it and, not far away, at the foot, was the Gave into which it emptied.

Had everything gone well at the mill, the life there must have been very pleasant. But apparently things did not go well from the very first. The Soubroux were both intelligent and kindly ; they did not seem unhappily mated, and in all their vicissitudes they were gentle with each other and never quarrelsome ; nevertheless, something was wrong. François, although a trained miller, could not make a go of things. Some said that he was indolent ; some said that he produced flour of inferior quality ; some said he was a bad business man, too easy with credit. Perhaps seven mills were too many for so small a community.

Then there were certain customs which were bad for business : hospitality had to be extended to all who came to the mill. Few left without at least a taste of bread and cheese and wine. Often the miller spent more than he took in. But the custom seemed to have been congenial to both the Soubroux, for Louise was young and company was pleasant, and she, who had been a very temperate person before her marriage, was slowly becoming over-fond of wine. François, although he was said to have been industrious and hard-working before his marriage, had become incautious, overhasty and indifferent to his own success. He had become much too fond of the café also. He did not drink to excess, but he spent time in games and in conversation which should have been spent in business.

On December 10, 1848, another child was born : a boy baptized Jean-Marie. In 1850, when Bernadette was six, the cousin, Jean-Marie Védère, who had stood godfather to her, was decorated for bravery by the Government. It is pleasant to have even this single happy episode to recall in this family. At about this time, Louise noticed the beginning of a serious difficulty with

Bernadette's breathing. It was then, and was throughout her life, called asthma, but there is no doubt but that it was tuberculosis. She was never again to be free of it.

On January 4, 1851, the three-year-child, Jean-Marie died. Four months later, May 13, 1851, another boy was born who was given the same name.

The economic condition of the family became rapidly worse, and finally, François' habit of extending credit for the payment of which he did not dare press, was his ruin, and in 1854 he was forced to give up Boly Mill.

The movements of the family during 1854 are hard to follow. They lived for a while at the Laborde house on the Rue du Bourg near the foot of the long ramp leading to the fort. It was along this way that the Black Prince had made his desperate attack against the equally desperate resistance of the garrison, but such romantic by-gone events doubtless dwelt but little in the minds of the Soubirous. There was a cholera epidemic that year and Bernadette, as well as most of the other children in the town, suffered from it. Afterward her breathing was worse; then she developed a chronic cough.

Either at this time, or a bit later her godmother, Aunt Bernarde, who lived at No. 1 Rue du Bourg, where her husband kept the inn, loaned François 900 francs, and, on account of Bernadette's bad health, took her to live at the inn with her. The family moved to another mill further down the Lapaca, called the Baudean Mill. There, on February 28, 1855, a baby boy, Justin, was born. The Soubirous lived there until the fall of that year when again they were unable to pay their rent and were evicted.

Bernadette, now living at the inn, did little household jobs and took constant care of two of the children of her aunt. She had never gone to school, and here she was

but little more fortunate, as her job of tending the children did not permit it. But her godmother saw to it that she learned the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Learning was hard for her, and since she could not read, even the catechism was a closed book. Perhaps according to their own lights and capacities, her aunt and uncle were kind to her. Certainly they can not be judged by the standards of what would be done today for a sick child of eleven, and they did not know that she had tuberculosis. But for a child of eleven to take care of children and do housework that kept her even from confirmation class is surely poor charity. Yet for such as it was she was grateful. She did have food, and that was more than her own home afforded her.

It is a bit puzzling, however, to know why these people, who were repeatedly referred to as "good Christians and devout Catholics," did not arrange for Bernadette's first Communion. It was the custom of that community for girls to make their first Communion at ten or eleven. It was a vital and important part of their lives ; more so even in that community than in most. The Daughters of Mary was a very strong organization there, and to be kept away from her catechism class must have been a great deprivation to Bernadette.

One little outburst of human pleasure and normal vanity she did have. Her uncle-in-law brought back from Bétharram several little rings for her to choose from, but they were all too big. On his next trip he brought another. It was too small. Yet she wanted it so badly that she was determined to get it on, and by struggling with her hands and her teeth she managed it. Her joy was great but short-lived, for her finger became so swollen that the ring had to be cut off. After that she never wanted another, she said later.

In the final tribute paid to her by her aunt, one gets a brief but vivid picture of a desolate child. "She was small and timid, and when scolded she did not answer."

In the fall of 1855 her family moved to still another mill. This time at Areizac-les-Angles, a small village three or four miles out on the road to Bagnères-de-Bigorre. They occupied the Escoubès Mill. Much the same difficulties beset this business venture that had wrecked the others. François turned more and more to the pleasanter life of the café; Louise more and more to the consolation of wine. And finally, when the last of the 900 francs loaned him by his sister-in-law had been dissipated the relatives cast them off. Louise's family had never particularly liked François and now they saw as little of them as possible.

François Soubirous is difficult to understand. His photograph seems to be that of an intelligent man, so that it was probably not a problem of inadequacy due to low-grade mentality. He was never unkind to his wife and children in the ordinary sense of the word. There is no hint of his having been involved with other women or with men of poor morals. But he seems to have had a great ineptitude for business and more than that, it apparently bored him greatly.

He was not incapable of effort, however. Bertrand Maisongrosse, a baker, commissioned him in 1855 to carry bread and flour between Luz and Lourdes — there was no railroad — and this involved a drive of perhaps twenty-five miles each way. This service he kept for three years, and to eke out the family income he did whatever other little bits of work he could find.

There would certainly seem to have been some factor in his failure that is not obvious to casual study; perhaps

some incompatibility with the state of marriage rather than with Louise. A knowledge of his earlier years might throw light on his later ones, for he was thirty-five when he married.

Louise seems easier to understand. She was seventeen at her marriage; pretty and respected, gay and good-hearted. Her pregnancies were very frequent; two of her children had died, she had toiled as a field-worker, even much too close to the birth of her children. The rapidly diminishing position of her family and finally being cast off by her own sisters is certainly enough to account for her need of alcohol. That she finally descended to the point where she could, with impunity, be referred to as a drunkard, is understandable.

In the spring of 1856, the family moved back to Lourdes, to the Rives house at No. 14 Rue du Bourg with a certain Jean Abadie. There Bernadette rejoined them. Sometimes the mother would not drink for a week or two and then, although they were utterly poverty-stricken, she would take the few sous available for bread and buy wine with them. Long before dawn she would scour the public common-land for bits of wood to sell; or she would get a small bit of laundry to do; but again, she would take the few pitiful pieces of household linen to sell for drink. Sometimes Bernadette's diet of the corn meal bread of the region was supplemented with white bread and wine but such luxuries were rare.

The Soubirous did not remain long at the Rives house for they could not pay the rent. The one remaining mark of respectability, the *armoire* for their clothing, had to be left there to satisfy the bill.

At last a true predicament faced them. They had become such notoriously bad tenants that no one would take them in. It was at this time that they went to

André Sajoux, a cousin of Louise, to ask him if he would let them occupy the unused cell-room of the old prison.

Sajoux's own family lived on the second floor; his stone-cutting shop was on the ground floor in front. He was apparently the only relative who would have anything to do with them, although he was not pleased with this idea. His wife was kindhearted, and the Soubirous were always hungry. He knew his wife would be tempted to give them bread, and he had five children of his own to support. But he felt sorry for them. He was a man full of compassion, and if Louise did drink, at least she was never quarrelsome and there was never any scandal in the street about it. Her own sisters would no longer help her. Dominique Vignes, Lucile's husband, forbade her even to go to the house to see them.

Thus it happened that around All Souls' Day, the first part of November, 1856, when they were evicted from the Rue du Bourg, the Soubirous moved to the house known as Le Cachot on the Petits-Fossés. There is an ominous quality in the old house that speaks with its own eloquence. It had been built against the old castle wall and directly in front of it was a little moat, as we may gather from the name *Petits-Fossés*. It had been filled in and covered over with cobble-stones but its origin was plain.

At the extreme end of the narrow unlighted hall on the ground floor, a heavy oak door led into a room, perhaps eight by ten feet in size. A little pale daylight came in through a heavily-barred window, that looked out on a high-walled court, perhaps five or six paces square, where the flagstones covered a drainage ditch. When André Sajoux had come into possession of the old prison, he had cut through another window and built a fireplace. Between the fireplace and the window, he had put a sink of

slate. He had tried to rent the room but no one would remain in it. The bell-ringer, the butcher, the blacksmith, all tried it, but found it intolerable. Finally, he had to rent it to penniless strangers in exchange for a bit of help with his stone. Then the Spanish terrace-makers, who spent the winter at Lourdes, used it as a flop-house. They stretched out on straw and slept there. But in the end even they gave it up and André, despairing of ever renting it, closed one of the windows and built up a manure-pile in the courtyard outside the other.

It was to this place that François and Louise were reduced. Into it they moved two wretched beds, two chairs, a little old trunk containing what remained of their linens and a few red pottery plates. And with them came also the vermin that seem only to desert the rich but never the very poor. There were François and Louise ; and Bernadette, aged twelve and a half ; Toinette, ten years old ; Jean-Marie, five years old, and Justin, about a year and a half. But for all their desperation, they were quiet and affectionate. They never quarreled and although the parents disciplined their children severely, after the fashion of the time and the place, they were always kind. They had other virtues too. With all their poverty they never begged. Once a week they went to Mass, and they made their devotions at Easter. Each night before they got into their miserable beds, André Sajoux could hear them reciting family prayers.

But prayers were often all they had to console themselves with ; frequently all food was lacking, and as they sold most of the wood they could gather, they had little heat. The children searched the alleys and refuse piles for rags and bones which they could sell for a few sous for food.

Still, hard as it is to believe, the worst was ahead of them.

One morning in March, before daybreak, François had got up to go out to Bartrès to gather faggots from the woods to sell. It was shortly after three o'clock when he left the house, and when he got opposite the wall of Dr. Dozous' garden he noticed a plank leaning against the wall. It was not his plank, to be sure, but it was unclaimed and on the public highway, so he took it back home. That night, in the house of his employer M. Maisongrosse, for whom he carried the flour to Luz, a robbery was committed : two sacks of flour were stolen from the bakery. His employer suspected him, and on March 22, 1857, François was arrested and imprisoned. In court he told of taking the plank, but denied the theft of the flour. The plank was found when the house was searched ; but not the flour.

On April 4th he was liberated ; not because he was considered innocent, but because his guilt could not be proved, and he had already been detained in jail seven days while the charge was pending. However, he was never cleared of this charge. André Sajoux believed in his innocence, but the family had been pushed further downhill in the eyes of the public.

One day Mademoiselle Estrade, one of the ladies of the town, who was praying in the church, was distracted by the sound of chairs being moved about by an emaciated little boy. In a low voice she cautioned him to be quiet, but although the child tried, he was not very successful. It was then that Mademoiselle Estrade noticed what the little boy was doing. It was Jean-Marie Soubirous, who was scraping up and eating the wax that had gutted from the candles at the service for the dead.

Meanwhile Marie Laguës, the woman who had acted as foster-mother for Bernadette, had not entirely lost

track of her. When she would come to Lourdes, she would tuck a piece of fruit-cake or a bunch of flowers or some other trifle into a basket for her. Several times a year Bernadette would go to her for brief visits. The day of John the Baptist is a local festival at Bartrès, and Bernadette and perhaps some other members of the family would go, usually for a day or two. Bartrès is an easy walk of only a few miles from Lourdes.

In September, 1857, Marie Laguës, whose family now consisted of her mother and father besides her eight children, found that the work was too heavy and that the lambs needed more care. She sent Jeanne-Marie Garros, her servant-girl, to Lourdes, to ask Louise if Bernadette could come to care for the children and help with the household and with the small animals. Bernadette's mother was willing.

Bernadette's packing was simple, for she had little more than the clothes on her back and her white Sunday head-dress, bought for a few sous from a pedlar outside the church. She had so little clothing, in fact, that when she wanted to wash it she had to borrow something of Jeanne-Marie Garros' to wear.

Marie Laguës had sent word to Bernadette's parents that if they would let her come she would be sent to school and would be taught her catechism. After coming to Bartrès, however, her life did not afford enough leisure for this. Every morning she would get up and help with the children and with the house. Then after preparing the traditional shepherd's breakfast of the region — soup, made of parched corn and vegetables — and a lunch for herself, she would set off with the lambs either to the meadow or to a place near the Ribolo barn. But work prevented her being sent to the promised school, although a time or two she went to the parish catechism

class, about which Madame Laguës also seemed, for a good Catholic, to have been very indifferent.

The parish was very pious. There were several church confraternities at that time. There were the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Confraternity of the Rosary. There was also the Confraternity of the Daughters of Mary. The little Romanesque church had John the Baptist as its patron saint, and it had a very sweet, and quite human-looking image of the Virgin, carved of wood and prettily painted. The procession to the various saints' altars was a favorite form of devotion there.

The parish priest at Bartrès does not seem to have noticed Bernadette particularly, except to make a sentimental comment that she was quite a charming picture as she led her flock, "like the sainted children of Salette." At least he remembered later to have said this, but by then it had become very popular to remember having seen her, and to have detected in her signs of the future.

Marie Laguës, mindful of the promise she had made, but either unable or unwilling to keep it, tried a little in the evening to teach Bernadette the catechism. It was said by some that Marie Laguës herself could not read, and besides the catechism was in French and Bernadette spoke only the local patois. After a long day's work, the lessons naturally did not go very well. Sometimes the same word had to be repeated over and over, and even then, Bernadette would barely remember it. Then in irritation, Marie Laguës would box her ears, and throwing down the book in despair, would exclaim, "Enough, you never will be anything but stupid and an ignoramus."

There was a brother of Marie Laguës', named Jean-Louis Aravant, whom Bernadette always remembered. But he was only there a short time that fall. He was a

young priest, and Bernadette recalled his brief visit with gratitude. She later told her cousin Jeanne Védère, a nun, that she was very unhappy at Bartrès except during the brief stay of the young priest. "He was good to me," she is reported to have said, "and as long as he was there he stood up for me, and I didn't have to suffer. But after that, the person who didn't like me resumed his [or her] usual rôle."

Many tales were told of her later — of how she built altars, and how she always had a rosary. But her friend, Jean-Marie Caudeban, a girl of her own age, said that she remembered none of these things. She did recall that Bernadette had several medals of the Blessed Virgin, and that she would not give her any of them. Her friend never saw her at catechism class or at confession.

It was also told, later, how Bernadette parted the water for her lambs to go through dry shod and also that when there was not enough meal she made it increase. When Bernadette was asked about these things later, she stated emphatically that there was absolutely no truth in them, that they were all false. She herself, could never remember to have told her rosary in the fields at Bartrès, nor to have gone to confession. She went very little to catechism. As for school, she said she went to see the teacher once in a while, but not to study. "The poor child," said Marie Laguës, "she was very thoughtful and affectionate, and she watched the sheep well, but she discouraged us when we tried to teach her — even her prayers."

Bernadette did not look like a girl who would soon be fourteen. She was very small ; some said, like a child of ten. And so the urgency that she felt in her own mind to make her first Communion was felt by no one else.

But her great desire to go home took on, finally, a most

urgent quality. She would watch the roads for people going down to Lourdes and beg them to ask her parents to let her return. "Tell them to come and get me." But her parents were in no hurry to take her back to Lourdes. Things were no better with them and it was winter. Misery reigned over the hovel on the Petits-Fossés ; so they waited.

At last, at the end of her restraint, Bernadette begged Basile Laguës for permission to go herself, and the permission was given. When she returned it was only to get her few belongings and go back to Lourdes. Whatever she had told her mother had at last borne fruit, for she was to enter the class conducted by the Abbé Pomian, in preparation for her first Communion.

She returned to Lourdes in January 1858, to the cell in the Petits-Fossés and to semi-starvation. A picture of her taken only a few months later shows her with the drawn face of an old woman, and with the pinched nostrils of extreme malnutrition.

It is said that in times gone by the angels, displeased at finding the home of the Blessed Virgin in the hands of infidels, had miraculously removed it from Nazareth to the town of Loreto in Italy. One day a cardinal of France was congratulating a cardinal of Italy on this event. "How fortunate you are," he said, "to have the veritable dwelling of the Blessed Virgin in your country."

"Ah! but yes," answered the cardinal of Italy, "though we have here her veritable dwelling, it does us little good. She is so rarely in it! She is always in France."

Within the region surrounding Lourdes there were more than twenty places held sacred to appearances of the Virgin. The little sanctuary of Our Lady of Bouix was established when a statue of the Virgin was found in the thicket; later this statue was placed in the church at Lourdes and marriages were performed before it.

The workers of Lourdes were formed into guilds, and each supported its chapel of the parish church and each had Our Lady as its patroness. Farm laborers had the guild of Our Lady of All Graces; the slate workers had Our Lady of Mount Carmel; the bricklayers, Our Lady of Montserrat. Then there was Our Lady of Bétharram; a bull, tearing the earth with his horns, turned up this statue of Our Lady. There was Our Lady of Sarrance, whose image had also been discovered by a bull, and Our Lady of Nestés, and Our Lady of Bourisp, whose statues were revealed by a heifer and an ox. In the castle fort itself there is a statue of the Virgin.

On the fifteenth day of August, the feast of the As-

sumption of the Blessed Virgin, fathers took their sons by the hand and mothers carried their youngest, and together they walked through the fields from altar to altar. In the old days Lourdes (and all Bigorre) had been vassal to Puy-en-Velay and the spiritual dependency was still great. It was said that the Blessed Virgin had revealed herself in Puy in apostolic times. Since the beginnings of Christianity, the Immaculate Conception of Mary had been honored, and in the cloisters at Puy there had been, for many centuries, an altar which was raised in honor of Mary immaculately conceived. So that when, after the apparition to Catherine Labouré in 1830, a medal was struck which showed the Blessed Virgin with luminous, outstretched hands and the prayer: "Oh Mary! conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee," the devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal was readily accepted in Lourdes. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX had proclaimed the Immaculate Conception of Mary to be a dogma of faith.

In the church at Lourdes the main altar nearest the sanctuary on the side of the choir was dedicated to "Mary immaculately conceived," and in 1841 a chapter of the society of the Daughters of Mary was founded there. In 1858, it numbered 130 members; the priest, Abbé Bertrand-Marie Pomian, a zealous man of thirty-six, was their leader. He was a pious man and a busy one. He was vicar and chaplain of the Hospice, and also gave time to the spiritual needs of the prison. During the cholera epidemic, he had shown courage and devotion. He had raised money for the new lectern, and for at least three years previous to January, 1858, he had given singing lessons. According to his bishop, he had intelligence and an ecclesiastical bearing; his instructions were solid and simple and his tastes good. The Hospice of which he

was chaplain was a combination school and hospital run by the Sisters of Nevers. Their mission was twofold : the care of the sick and the education of the young. Well-to-do girls received an education there, but the poor could only be provided for to the extent of being taught the catechism and prepared for their first Holy Communion.

Toward the end of January the Abbé enrolled in his class of girls to be prepared for their first Communion, the eldest of the little girls of the family of Louise and François Soubirous, who had just passed her fourteenth birthday. Each day she walked the short distance to the Hospice and each day she came home to the cell of the Petits-Fossés. Her mother was not drinking quite so much now ; perhaps there was not even the few sous for wine or a piece of linen left to be sold. But the family suffered so much from hunger that at last François remained most of his time in bed. The meager income from M. Maisongrosse had been cut off with the accusation of theft. Occasionally the mother got a day's washing to do.

Yet even so the family managed to maintain certain standards. What they did wear was clean and neat, and although their bodies were depleted by semi-starvation, they never whimpered or begged, and the children would manage to amuse themselves even though their stomachs were empty.

Little Amanda Jacomet, the five-year-old daughter of the police commissioner, had learned to knit, and her first piece of work was a pair of stockings which she wished to give to the poorest child they met, "even though it were Spanish." But shortly she saw a girl of apparently twelve or thirteen, leading a small boy by

the hand. Soon the stockings were covering his naked feet. It was little Justin Soubirous, being led by Bernadette.

Bernadette's relationship to her family seems to have been normal. There was a normal amount of agreement and disagreement between the children and of obedience and disobedience to the parents. Bernadette said of herself later that she was very stubborn, but as this was never remarked by other people, perhaps it was more a stubbornness of mind than of behavior. One trait, however, does seem to stand out: an astonishing patience in the face of her argumentative elders. What she believed, she believed, and held to — a trait that she was to need and to show all the rest of her life.

Although she lived in a community where religion was certainly the major preoccupation, she appears to have been only normally religious. She did demand and continue to demand her right to her first Communion. She loved to pray before the altar of Our Lady of All Graces, sustained by the guild of farm laborers. (This altar stands now in the cell at the Petits-Fossés.) Not to belong to the organization of the Daughters of Mary was also to be uncomfortably set apart. Although she was very delicate, with whistling respiration and a bad cough, she was not given to nervous behavior attacks of any kind.

Her hair, which was very dark, was parted in the middle and she wore the usual kerchief and shawl. Her narrow, small head was beautifully shaped; her forehead low, her mouth large and expressive. Her skin was dark and her cheeks were usually flushed. But her eyes were her outstanding feature: dark and deep under level brows. Her husky voice was full of kindness. In spite of her continual suffering she was uncomplaining.

Many writers have implied that she was a simpleton of limited intelligence. There is no basis for this. She could not read because she had never had the chance to learn. She had trouble memorizing the catechism because she could not read and because it was in French and not in the dialect which she spoke. But in the latter part of her life there were many definite indications of a very fine intelligence. Perhaps the strongest impression that she gave with her grace of body and slow speech and unflinching eyes, was that of great candor and perfect tranquility, and a certain decisive gaiety that even the appalling circumstances under which she lived could not do away with.

The First Apparition, Thursday, February 11, 1858

There was a heavy cold mist on that memorable 11th of February in 1858, and the glacier-fed river sent a penetrating chill through the little town. The tops of the mountains were hidden in heavy clouds. It had been raining for several days and so in the cell-room of the Soubirous there was no wood with which to cook the meager breakfast. François was in bed, sick with hunger.

But the weather was clearing a bit. The rain had stopped and Bernadette, Toinette and a young neighbor, Jeanne Abadie, wanted to go to hunt for twigs and branches. Bernadette's mother objected, but at last consented if she would wear her shawl and stockings with her wooden *sabots* and avoid getting wet. The girls took a basket, hoping possibly to find bones or rags that might be saleable.

They went by the cemetery road, then around below the fort, and along the river road toward the bridge. Pascale Lavit, an old relative called "Tata" by the Soubirous children, was there in her white bonnet, washing M. Clarens' linen on the bank of the stream. She suggested to the girls that they cross over to the other side to the common-land of the town where perhaps wood had been washed up by the river.

There was only one bridge across the Gave—the Vieux Pont, resting on arches planted on huge boulders in the stream. They passed under the arches of the Baoûs gate that supported the old defense tower of the

town wall, and on along the wood road that lead out to the communal forest.

The tree-lined shore was cut by a canal that supplied the Savy sawmill with power. But the mill and the mill-race were quiet and the rough, rutted road was deserted that day. The wood road that lead up the steep foothills, was not an important road ; besides an occasional person going to Batsurguère, it was used mainly by fishermen and woodcutters, or by the town herdsmen who took the pigs that way. Every morning Paul Leyrisse went through the town sounding his horn and people would drive their swine out to him, so that he might lead them to the banks of the Gave near the rock known as the Massabieille. At the edge of the cliff the path descended, steep and rough and narrow, through the thicket. All day the swine would stray there, going into the grottos at will or foraging in the bush on the bank.

It was a deserted and wild spot, and one not frequented by polite society. When someone in the village was exceptionally crude or ill-mannered the people would say "he must have had his education down along the banks under the Massabieille."

It is said that green branches were once sent yearly to Our Lady of Puy-en-Velay to indicate the vassalage of these woods, but the Massabieille had never really had a good name. Probably ever since the Christian era it had had an ominous one. Tales of terror were told of happenings in its shallow caverns, and it was said that wise shepherds crossed themselves before entering.

Prophecies had been made about it too. Wonders would one day take place there. A dying priest had once said, "On the side of the forest something marvellous will happen." And in long by-gone times, a child

was said to have announced, "There will be, in time to come, an apparition in that Grotto of the Massabielle."

The three little girls followed the road toward the old rock, but they stopped at the idle mill and then went down the overgrown meadow alongside the canal of the quiet millrace. Toinette and Jeanne carried some wood that they had found, but Bernadette had none. Jeanne was much stronger than the others, and even Toinette was larger and stronger than Bernadette.

Sometimes, where the canal and the Gave join, the water is high and swift, but that day it came only to the knees of the little girls. They stopped on the near side and prepared to cross. Facing them was the Massabielle, a rock, about sixty feet high, jutting out of the face of a cliff perhaps twice that height. On the top were dense woods; at the foot, where the girls were standing, the ravine was naked and vegetation sparse. Some boxwood and pine and a lacing of ivy helped to dress the bare rocks and earth pockets. Moss showed through the tangle of the bare branches and the wood of the hazel bush gave a little color.

Toinette and Jeanne, throwing their *sabots* across the millrace, waded through, and then crouched into their skirts, whimpering from the icy water and bundling their legs in their skirts to warm them. Bernadette was afraid to follow them. Her mother had told her under no circumstances to get wet, and she herself dreaded the inevitable coughing spell.

She began to throw stepping stones into the water, but they were not steady enough to support her. She begged the others to help her, but they told her to cross as they had. Then they left her and, gathering wood by the way, went on down the bank of the river.

Presently Toinette, looking back, saw Bernadette on her knees. "Just look at Bernadette there, praying to God."

"Pious she is!" said Jeanne. "But let her go! She isn't much good for anything but praying."

The noon Angelus was ringing. The penetrating mist was cold; the air was still. A little diffused light spread itself evenly in all directions. Bernadette, deciding at last to cross, leaned down to take off her stockings and *sabots* when unexpectedly she heard a rustling as of a little breeze. She looked quickly across the river to a meadow where poplars grew, but the poplars and all else stood unmoving. Slowly she turned her head to look at the ill-omened grotto.

At a small opening above, where the time-worn rock bore the semblance of a Gothic arch, there was an old wild rosebush, the white eglantine — its knotty branches veiling the opening of the little niche, climbing branches bare now in the winter cold.

She saw this bush trembling, and in the midst of it and behind it with her little feet just touching the mossy ledge, stood a figure no larger than herself, white and luminous, a figure which nodded its head slightly and held out its open arms.

Fear seized Bernadette. She put her hands over her eyes to close out the apparition. But the little *damizélo* smiled. Then Bernadette fell to her knees. In terror she put her hand into her pocket to draw out her rosary. She tried to make the sign of the cross but she could not raise her hand to her forehead; it fell away limp.

The *damizélo* turned away for a moment. When she turned again she had a rosary in her hand also. With indescribable grace she made the sign of the cross and Bernadette, with numb hand, attempted it again and



Bernadette at the Time of the Apparitions

succeeded. Then, half-dead with fright, she ran the beads through her fingers while the beads ran through the fingers of the apparition and Bernadette gazed with absorbed eyes.

The little white *damizélo* was very young. She was not quite so tall as Bernadette and very small. Her face was white as wax, and it was long and of inexpressible grace. She was smiling, too. Her eyes were blue. She resembled just a little Our Lady of All Graces, before whose altar Bernadette was fond of praying.

The neck of her dress was drawn together on a cord, the ends of which were looped. The white material, the like of which Bernadette had never seen before, was perhaps more like tulle than anything else, but entirely superior to it. The dress was a little like that of the Daughters of Mary when on their day of admission to the society they wear the white robes and veil and carry the rosary. It was a bit also like that of the little rich girl of the village whose mother dressed her all in white.

But above all things the figure was luminous, very white, and very luminous. Her whole body was luminous, both brilliant and soft at the same time. Her veil, of the same luminous material, showed, at the temple, a little of the hair, but fell quite plainly over the shoulders, from the forehead to the hem.

Around her waist was a girdle of blue, as wide as two hands. Folded over in the front, it fell, still in a little fold, to the bottom of her robe where her feet, only the tips of which showed, were bare. And, where the robe touched them, they were ornamented each with a gleaming golden rose, like no rose that grows on earth.

In her hands the rosary gleamed — large white beads on the gold-colored metal. The cross gleamed also, and hung from a central ornament in the form of a heart.

When her hands were joined at her breast, the rosary fell quite to her knees. It had five decades, just as Bernadette's did, and there in the bitter cold of the mountain fog they told their beads together. When they had completed the rosary, the little white apparition, with a smile and a tiny inclination of her head, disappeared.

Toinette and Jeanne came slowly back along the bank of the river, laden with dead wood swept in by the current. Bernadette still on her knees, looked toward the niche in the rock. They called to her but she neither answered nor turned her head. Toinette picked up a pebble and threw it toward her. One pebble even grazed her shoulder, but still she did not move.

Suddenly Bernadette became conscious of the girls. "How silly to be praying," said Toinette in disgust. "You would have done better to stay at home. You should have been picking up wood, and you kneel to pray."

Jeanne, who was cold and wet, climbed the steep path behind the niche carrying her bundle of faggots and the bones that they had found, leaving the two sisters to return together.

"If you will promise never to speak of it, I will tell you something," said Bernadette. "I saw something all dressed in white, with a blue sash and with yellow roses on its feet. You can believe it! I never knew, really, how to make the sign of the cross until this young girl did it. Then something made me raise my hand."

"You just tell me that to frighten me," answered Toinette, jumping up. "But I don't care now that we are on the road."

The two girls reached home and threw the faggots against the door. They found a little bread on the shelf and Bernadette stepped into the hallway. Then Toinette was tempted. She had not intended to tell but as they

stood by the window she did whisper to her mother what had happened.

Louise called Bernadette at once and questioned her angrily.

"Yes, I saw the rosebush moving and that (*aquéro*) behind it in white."

Louise scolded them a little and slapped them a bit. "Your eyes have deceived you," she said. "Perhaps it was a white stone that you saw."

But Bernadette persisted. "A white girl no bigger than I, who made me a little bow with her head."

"Perhaps," Louise answered, "it may have been the stray soul of one of our relatives in Purgatory who needs prayers." François was less lenient. "Already you are starting to do foolish things," he exclaimed. He thought the white thing was something bad.

Prayers at bedtime were a ceremony in the Soubirous house. It was while they were reciting, "Oh, Mary, conceived without sin — pray for us who have recourse to thee," that Bernadette burst into tears.

Louise was afraid. She called in one or two neighbors and sent for the aunt who was Bernadette's godmother. Louise believed that Bernadette had seen something, but she did not believe it was a good something. The neighbors were astonished. The aunt thought it was a dream, an illusion, and would soon pass.

"In any event," said Louise to Bernadette, "I forbid you ever to return to the grotto."

"There ! She has her rosary on her right arm. She is looking at us. She is smiling." But they saw nothing. Pauline Bourdeu, overcome with panic, scrambled back up the little path and ran away. But Marie Herriott remembered the vial of holy water.

"Here," she called, pressing it into Bernadette's hand, "throw some on her." Bernadette took the vial and, advancing a bit, threw some of it at the apparition. "If you come on the part of God, approach !" she said.

"Is she still there ?" they called.

"Yes, she is there. She nods, she smiles. She makes the sign of the cross !"

Suddenly a stone as large as a loaf of bread fell from the top of the cliff, struck the rock a little to the left of where Bernadette was kneeling, rebounded, and fell into the millrace. The interior of the grotto resounded with a great noise. The apparition vanished.

Bernadette's eyes dilated, her face grew waxen. She became unconscious of her surroundings. The other girls were panic-stricken. They had not seen Jeanne Abadie at the top of the cliff, nor heard her exclaim, "Wait ! I am going to do away with her for you — that little white girl !"

When Jeanne and those with her ran down the path, they found the girls supporting Bernadette and trying to lead her away. But her trance-like state was so complete that she could not be reasoned with. Some of the girls ran to the sawmill to get help. The mother of the miller and her sister were walking by the mill-stream. They went back to the grotto with the children. There they found Bernadette still so bewildered that they were unable to move her any more than the girls had been. So they ran back for the miller himself — Antoine Nicolau.

As they ran to call him, they passed a few of the girls

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"In any event," said Louise to Bernadette, "I forbid you ever to return to the grotto."

Bernadette was apparently deeply affected and puzzled by the apparition at the Massabielle. Something was calling her to return to the Old Rock! But she had been forbidden to do so.

There had apparently been little reserve in spreading the story. And it is hardly to be expected that the "few neighbors" and the godmother called in for consultation should have been very reticent. Some people thought that what had been seen was a soul from Purgatory in need of prayers, some that it was the devil disguised as the Blessed Virgin, and some that it was the Blessed Virgin herself. The conclusion of everyone seems to have been that if Bernadette were to return she should carry with her holy water with which to sprinkle the apparition. For the devil or any evil spirit, it was believed, would disappear if holy water were sprinkled on it, and, if it were a celestial spirit, it would not object.

Bernadette's confessor, however, was the one to decide, and accordingly, at nightfall on Saturday, in the cold stone church lighted by candles, Bernadette went to the confessional of the Abbé Pomian. He had not heard the gossip. He did not, indeed, even know Bernadette's name, or remember that she was in his catechism class. After questioning her, he decided to talk to the Curé Peyramale. Neither the Abbé Pomian nor the Curé Peyramale attached any importance to what she had experienced and she was not forbidden by them to return to the grotto. Apparently apparitions were an old story to these men, whose lives were lived among peasants.

The Second Apparition, Sunday, February 14th

On Sunday, February 14th, was celebrated the Devotion of Forty Hours. Toinette, Jeanne and Bernadette went to ten o'clock Mass. As they were leaving Mass, they met several little girls and together they set out to win Louise Soubirous' consent to go back to the Massabielle. Louise remonstrated, but finally François gave his consent.

They went back to the house to get a vial from the mantel and then, considerably augmented by recruits brought up by Toinette and Jeanne, went first to the church, filled the bottle with holy water from the stoup, prayed, and, going down the street to the gate and bridge, crossed to the road to the woods.

The group of which Bernadette was the center reached the hilltop well in advance of the rest. There they met some men who jestingly called to them, "You'd better not go down there, the Blessed Virgin will catch you!" Pauline Bourdeu said that by then they were all afraid.

Bernadette scrambled down the slope ahead of the others. When they reached the spot in front of the grotto they found her already kneeling. She made the others kneel, and Toinette took out her cheap little rosary that Bernadette had brought her from Bétharram. Marie Herriott had the vial of holy water in her pocket. They crossed themselves and began to recite the rosary.

"Do you see her?" Marie Herriott kept asking.

The first three decades of the rosary had been recited, and then two more, when suddenly Bernadette exclaimed, "I see a brightness!"

"Where?" they cried.

She put her arm around the neck of one of them and pointed with her finger.

"There ! She has her rosary on her right arm. She is looking at us. She is smiling." But they saw nothing. Pauline Bourdeu, overcome with panic, scrambled back up the little path and ran away. But Marie Herriott remembered the vial of holy water.

"Here," she called, pressing it into Bernadette's hand, "throw some on her." Bernadette took the vial and, advancing a bit, threw some of it at the apparition. "If you come on the part of God, approach !" she said.

"Is she still there ?" they called.

"Yes, she is there. She nods, she smiles. She makes the sign of the cross !"

Suddenly a stone as large as a loaf of bread fell from the top of the cliff, struck the rock a little to the left of where Bernadette was kneeling, rebounded, and fell into the millrace. The interior of the grotto resounded with a great noise. The apparition vanished.

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When Jeanne and those with her ran down the path, they found the girls supporting Bernadette and trying to lead her away. But her trance-like state was so complete that she could not be reasoned with. Some of the girls ran to the sawmill to get help. The mother of the miller and her sister were walking by the mill-stream. They went back to the grotto with the children. There they found Bernadette still so bewildered that they were unable to move her any more than the girls had been. So they ran back for the miller himself — Antoine Nicolau.

As they ran to call him, they passed a few of the girls

who, frightened away from the grotto, were standing around on the top of the cliff. When they reached the mill, they found Antoine dressed to go in to Lourdes to the inn. "Bernadette is at the Grotto of the Massabielle : she sees something there, I do not know what, but we couldn't get her away ; come help us."

Bernadette was still on her knees, staring fixedly at the niche. Her rosary was clasped in her hands. Tears ran from her dilated eyes. There was a smile on her face. The children stood and stared at her. The miller looked toward the niche but could see nothing. With the help of the others, he tried to lead her away, but she wrenched herself free and tried to throw herself forward crying "Ah ! Ah !"

"Lower your eyes, foolish child," he said to her. He dried her eyes and covered them with his hand to prevent her from seeing whatever it was that held her spellbound. But each time she would raise her head again, open her eyes, and smile.

All together they finally got her on to the path, and, in spite of much resistance, to the plateau. As they pulled her along the path they questioned her, but she did not answer ; she was insensible to her surroundings. All the way to the mill her face and eyes retained their fixed expression, and tears ran down her cheeks.

When they got her along the road a bit, toward the mill, they passed a man from Batsurguère who tried to reassure them. "Don't be afraid," he said, "nothing will happen." It was he, later, who carried the first news of all of this to an outlying district.

They got her to the mill and here suddenly her consciousness of her surroundings returned. "I saw a very beautiful little girl," she cried, "and she had her hands joined," and then she began in great excitement to show

them how the little girl held her hands. The color returned to her face. They led her into the kitchen and questioned her.

"What is that that you see in that hole? You see something that is not good!"

"Oh no," she answered, "I see a very beautiful little young lady. She has a rosary on her arm and her hands are joined."

Meanwhile, Louise Soubirous was visiting with a neighbor woman, Cyprine Gesta, when Toinette and Jeanne burst in.

"Bernadette has gone crazy," they cried. "She is at the mill, she sees the White Maiden who follows her! Come get her."

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Louise, "I forbade her to go there!" and she ran with the steadily increasing crowd across the bridge and to the mill, which was full of people. Louise was much annoyed. "You make everybody come running." But Bernadette answered her, "I didn't tell anyone to follow me."

Long afterward, Bernadette said that, from the time of the falling of the stone to the time her mother came for her, she remembered nothing. But Jeanne Abadie, the girl who had thrown the stone, always remembered it. "Alas! that stone lies heavy on my heart! Suppose I should have hit the Blessed Virgin."

While Bernadette and her mother were returning to town, Cyprine Gesta, who had come with her, said to another woman, "Let's go see this grotto, and see what it is that the little girl sees." But they saw nothing except a hole in the rock and a large old rosebush. Other women, up in town, had heard after Mass that Bernadette had gone to the grotto again, and four or five of

them followed. But by that time the grotto had been deserted for the mill, and finding the place deserted the women were afraid.

The miller had gone on to the inn kept by Bernadette's Aunt Bernarde, and there he told about it.

Women going to vespers heard about it.

A man told about it on his way through Omex.

And all the little girls who had been with Bernadette poured back into the town and told over and over of her tears and of her smiles. She was no longer Bernadette, but one of the adoring angels in the parish church !

Many contradictory stories were told. Some, for instance, changed the yellow roses on the feet of the apparition into yellow satin slippers, some to embroidered flowers, and some to a bouquet in her hand. But if anyone were closely questioned : "Well, I could swear that I heard someone tell that, but I can't remember just who."

From that day on there was ceaseless discussion of the Mysterious Being who had appeared at the Massabielle, and of Bernadette, who had seen it. On that day, Bernadette had sealed the doom of her privacy. She was never again to be able to withdraw from the glare of publicity, or cease to be the subject of acrimonious debate. Of what the apparition was compounded, they could not agree. But most believed either that it was the Blessed Virgin, or that it was the returned soul of someone in need of prayer. Some, to be sure, held a less complimentary viewpoint. "Apparitions at the Massabielle ?" exclaimed Fanny Nicolau. "Why, they take the pigs there !"

Reverend Mother Alexandrine Roques was the superior of the Convent and School of the Sisters of Nevers, in Lourdes, in the Hospice of which Bernadette was being prepared for her first Communion. She seems not to have been sympathetic to the idea of Bernadette's having had an apparition. She told her before the other children that it was an illusion. "It is the effect of your imagination. Stop thinking about it." And she added, "If it is not an illusion, and if you really see the Blessed Virgin, ask her to teach you the catechism — which it is such an effort for you to learn."

Bernadette fared no better with the little girls, who pulled her about and called her a clown.

The Abbé Pomian hardly considered the story worth listening to. He had heard her confession the Saturday previous, but he was so little aware of her that he had to call her name out at catechism in order to identify her. "Her mind was a clean slate as far as any theory or doctrine was concerned," he said later.

But the women of the village of Lourdes were by no means so indifferent. In October one of their number had died, Mademoiselle Élisabeth Latapie. She had been the president of the Society of the Daughters of Mary, and on her death bed had requested that she be buried in the white robe of the society. "I request," she said, "a cap without ribbon or lace," and she wanted a simple burial. It was inevitable that her friends should have thought of her when they heard of Bernadette's "little white *damizélo*."

Madame Millet had been one of Mademoiselle Latapie's admirers. She was an ex-servant who had made a fortunate marriage with a well-to-do master. Working for Madame Millet as a seamstress was young Mademoiselle Antoinette Peyret.

These two women felt certain that the apparition was the spirit of Mademoiselle Latapie, and on Tuesday they went to Louise Soubirous to ask her to permit Bernadette's return to the grotto. They wished to take pen and ink and to ask the apparition to write her name and her wishes. Tired of struggling, but still reluctant, Louise consented. The plan was made for them to go on the following Sunday morning — but since they wished privacy, and Sunday was a bad day for that in Lourdes, Thursday was decided on.

The Third Apparition, Thursday, February 18th

On Thursday morning very early, Louise had gone out before Bernadette was up to do some washing for Fanny Nicolau. It had been Fanny who had thought the Mas-sabieille a fit place for pigs but not for apparitions, and she had apparently not changed her opinion of it. Accordingly, she thought it her duty to remonstrate. "Why do you let this little one go thus to the grotto? You are going to have trouble with the Commissioner." And in this respect she certainly showed good judgment. Louise, frightened, ran home to stop her but Bernadette had already gone; was, indeed, just returning.

Thursday, the 18th, was the bi-weekly market day of Lourdes. The weather was fine and the town was filled early with a considerable crowd from the surrounding district. Bernadette, Madame Millet and Mademoiselle Peyret had left the house early. Madame Millet carried

the blessed candle and Mademoiselle Peyret an inkwell and, as her father was a sheriff's officer and owned a pen, she carried that.

The walk down to the river and across the bridge and up the wood road to the top of the cliff could not have taken long. Bernadette passed ahead and ran swiftly down the path, the two older people going down much more slowly. They knelt in front of the grotto with Bernadette between them. They lighted the candle and sheltered the flame with their hands.

Bernadette was very withdrawn. They had hardly started the rosary when she exclaimed, "She is there!"

Mademoiselle Peyret said, "Take this paper and pen and ink and go ask this lady what she wants, and tell her to put it in writing."

Bernadette approached the opening of the grotto. She stood on tiptoe and held the paper toward the rosebush and the niche. But the apparition withdrew down through the aperture and went into the grotto, so close to Bernadette that she said that by putting out her hand she could have touched her. Bernadette placed the objects upon a rock. "If you come on the part of God," she said, "be so good as to tell me what you wish: if not, go away." Bernadette saw her smile. And then for the first time she heard her speak. "What I have to say to you it is not necessary to put in writing. If I cannot procure your happiness in this world, I can procure it for you in the other." It seemed to Bernadette that the sound of the White Lady's words did not pass through her ears but through her heart. "Would you have the kindness," the apparition continued, "to come here for fifteen days? It would give me pleasure."

"I will come; I will ask my parent's permission," Ber-

nadette answered. And as she spoke the apparition rose toward the vaulting of the grotto and disappeared.

They went back into the town talking of it. She was much surprised that the two women had not heard the words of the apparition. "She addressed me as 'vous,' " she admitted with some confusion.

Madame Millet believed that it was the Blessed Virgin. Mademoiselle Peyret remained incredulous. She did not think that it was the Blessed Virgin, neither did she think it was anything diabolical. "But if you are lying," she said to Bernadette, "the good God will punish you."

Bernadette's family was deeply distressed by her promise to return to the grotto for fifteen days. They were terrified, yet attracted by the supernatural, but since neither her confessor nor her godmother forbade it, they decided that she should return to the grotto, but always accompanied by some member of her family.

The Fourth Apparition, Friday, February 19th

Accordingly, on February the 19th, at daybreak, wrapped against the clear cold mountain weather, a black cape clutched about her thin shoulders, Bernadette and her mother went to the grotto. They had wanted to attract as little attention as possible, but Lourdes rises early and people unfastening their shutters saw them and followed. Madame Millet was doubtless with them also, for she had taken Bernadette to her house as a guest in order to bask a little in the light of the publicity that was already shining on Bernadette. Bernadette had remained there for but two days however, and then had returned home.

On that morning her Aunt Bernarde went also. She

thought Bernadette should have some blessed object there and arranged to take a blessed candle. In all there were five or six people with her.

She took the lighted candle and knelt with it in one hand, the rosary in the other. And she had hardly started to recite the rosary when the apparition was there. Bernadette did not have to tell them when the Lady appeared. Her whole manner changed. Her eyes were fixed on the niche, her face became pale and waxlike. There was a little movement of her lips and from time to time a smile.

"Oh, how beautiful she is!" someone exclaimed of Bernadette.

"She is dying," called out another.

"Oh God, do not take my daughter from me," cried Louise.

The apparition lasted for about thirty minutes, and at the end Bernadette made a little startled movement.

And on the road as the women parted they said, "We'll see you in the morning." To be present at the apparitions had become an accepted routine.

In the evening she went to the house of one of the women whose husband was a leather-worker. They questioned her about what she had seen. She called the apparition "a little maiden" (*uo pétito damizélo*). And when she had finished the leather-worker said to her, "If you want to wear a medal of the Blessed Virgin I will give you a cord for it," and he made one of leather and gave it to her.

The Fifth Apparition, Saturday, February 20th

On the morning of the 20th, a Saturday, the space between the rock and the river was filled with people.

Friends were roused before dawn by friends, children by parents, for it was known that Bernadette would go early to the rock.

The children slid between the people in an effort to get where they could see. "Here, little one, get in front of me, you will see better."

They talked, they made some reflections, and they philosophized until suddenly :

"Here she comes."

"Here comes Bernadette."

"She is there."

"She is here."

Then they were silent. Bernadette was with her god-mother. She knelt and lighted the candle. She began to pass the beads between her fingers. Suddenly her hands were still. Her face became waxlike and shining, her smile very brilliant.

"Now she sees her," the women murmured.

For a time she was smiling. Then she became very pensive. She seemed to be listening with great attention. Then she sighed — one heard a sound like a prolonged "yes." Then the by-standers could see her lips moving, but they could hear nothing. The apparition was teaching Bernadette a prayer for her own use. She listened now with keen attention, now with an air of great languor. Then suddenly color came back into her face. It was over. She got up and with her aunt returned to the village without paying any attention to those around her.

Nothing else was being talked of in town. And still opinions differed. Rosine Cazenave thought that it was the Blessed Virgin, and that Bernadette looked as the adoring angels in Heaven must look. Germaine Raval,

her companion, was not so favorably impressed. But when they joined in urging the sister of one of them to go she refused because those people closest to Bernadette and seen with her at the grotto did not enjoy so good a reputation in the town !

Meanwhile the officials of the little village had not been inactive. Sergeant D'Angla of the police had begun, quite quietly, an investigation of this matter which was upsetting the community. He wanted to know if there was anything crooked behind it, and he had both Bernadette and her parents watched attentively to see if they were taking advantage of the religious credulity of the people in order to better their condition.

Joseph D'Angla was forty-one years old. He was a D'Angla de la Plane, a good family of Auvergne which had been knighted by Louis XIV. By this time, however, their vast and ancient estates had been dispersed and most of them had dropped their titles of nobility. He did not know Bernadette, but from what others thought of her he took her for an imbecile. That seemed the general belief. Also, as he testified, she was of very ordinary appearance. She had hallucinations, he thought ; she dreamed and believed in them ! But he took the trouble to go to the grotto and watch her and then, strangely enough, she was not repugnant : she was beautiful. Even her fixed gaze he found appealing and, "I said to myself 'she believes, that child !' "

Nevertheless he questioned her and when he had the opportunity, he said to her, "You silly child, with your stupidity you will bring only trouble to yourself in the end." Perhaps, he thought, the story she was relating was compounded of memories of the stories of other apparitions which she had heard.

He even offered her money in the presence of her

parents to make her talk, but he failed in his purpose. He could not bring himself to believe in the apparitions, yet somehow he did not think that she was lying. But, he thought, "Is it possible that the Blessed Virgin could appear to such a low-class child as this? Such trash! And the daughter of such impossible parents!"

So Sergeant D'Angla sent his usual reports to his superior, Lieutenant Bourriots of Argelès, and he in turn reported to Major Renault of Tarbes. Major Renault was a very religious man. "He went to Mass"; says the report, "he died a colonel."

It was not exactly within his province to interfere because there was in Lourdes an Imperial Procurator, whom we would call a prosecuting attorney — M. Dutour — and there was also a Commissioner of Police, M. Jacomet. But when Major Renault was told, "Extraordinary things are happening at Lourdes; people are going to the grotto to witness apparitions," he answered, "We will leave for Lourdes this afternoon." And that very evening they arrived at Lourdes and arranged to go to the grotto on the morning of Sunday, the 21st.

The four officials acted in concert. None of them expected any good to come out of a Soubirous, and they were quick to suspect blackmail of some sort.

They were at the grotto, in fatigue uniform, early the next morning.

In Lourdes there lived also a Dr. Dozous, a physician then in his sixtieth year who later was to become one of Bernadette's first biographers. He seems to have been a very self-important, busy person who felt that the welfare of the community lay on his shoulders. Medical training at that time was not very good, and Dr. Dozous seems to have had rather less than the usual amount. Nevertheless his descriptions of what took place are of

interest, and his incidental comments on the community life even more so. He was very full of curiosity to see this visionary in front of the grotto and so on Sunday morning he also went.

The Sixth Apparition, Sunday, February 21st

The crowd was large, for people had been coming since before daybreak. The earlier arrivals took their place in front of the grotto, but as the crowd grew, people stood on boulders on the edge of the river or climbed trees and clung to the branches that dangled over the heads of the people below. One false step, one snapping branch, and there would have been a serious accident.

They did not have long to wait, Dr. Dozous tells us. As soon as Bernadette came, she knelt on the spot that had now become habitual to her — a flat stone in front of the grotto. She took out her rosary and holding it in her left hand, held the lighted candle with the other. There was a draft that day and the candle was repeatedly blown out, but each time she handed it to someone to re-light. The doctor, who wanted to know the state of her pulse and respiration, was quite near her. He took hold of one of her arms and placed his finger on the radial artery. Her pulse was calm and regular. Her breathing was easy.

When he released her she moved a bit forward on her knees toward the grotto. Then suddenly her face, which had been very joyous, became overcast. The Lady's eyes, which had been gazing into hers, looked away into the distance with great sadness.

"What saddens you, my Lady?" Bernadette asked her. And the Lady looking back at her again said, "Pray for poor sinners! Pray for the world so troubled!" And then, with an expression of great compassion, she disappeared.

On the way home when they asked her, "Why do you weep sometimes?" she answered, "I weep because my Lady weeps."

"Reckoning from this moment," writes Dr. Dozous, "Bernadette became for all of those who had seen her in prayer before the grotto of the Massabielle, a privileged being, selected to become a faithful messenger between heaven and earth, a powerful link to transmit to man the will of a superior natural person."

Talking and arguing hotly, the crowd poured back into the village. Out of respect they had kept silent at the grotto, but once back in town they wandered around and hunted up friends. And those who had not gone to the grotto leaned from windows or congregated on door steps or poured out of the houses to join the groups of talking people. Each man interpreted the facts according to his principles and his habits. And people from out of town made ready to spread the account of it in the country round about.

The authorities were aroused on several scores. They doubted, first of all, the honesty of the Soubirous family : they believed that they had some underlying scheme to enrich themselves. And they also had a very legitimate fear of accidents at the grotto. No accident had yet occurred, but the officials felt that it would be foolish to delay action.

The Major from Tarbes rode away. He was not completely satisfied, but he did not make fun of what he had seen and he asked the local authorities to send an officer each day to report on what took place and the number and kind of people who went.

The local authorities did even better than just send reports : they also held interviews. M. Jacques-Vital Dutour, the Imperial Procurator, was a good man, the

father of a family, and forty-one years of age at the time of which we write. Two of his sisters were nuns. He had no high opinion of the Soubirous. Only recently at Tarbes, the family connection had been in serious disgrace. One of Louise's aunts had been married to a man whose niece had been condemned to death, and then, of course, there was the recent trial of François for theft.

M. Dutour spoke to Bernadette on her return from the grotto that Sunday and asked her to come with him to the office where he held court. She went willingly, alone and apparently quite unafraid. She stood at a table by the fire, leaning on it lightly while he questioned her. He described her appearance and the impression that she made on him : She had great dignity of bearing and there was no artifice in her dress ; she was very plain and simple, and irreproachably neat. Her cotton dress and her head kerchief had been washed so often that the pattern was indistinct and faded. The kerchief covered half of her forehead and was bound very tightly around her head.

Her breathing was labored and painful but she spoke her native dialect well. He said of her that whenever she experienced a noble sentiment her speech had a sort of suave charm. The Imperial Procurator looked at her severely. "My girl, I find that you are getting yourself talked about too much. You have been told," he said to her, "that your apparition is a dream, an illusion. Is it true that you go to the grotto every morning?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, "I have promised to go there for a fortnight."

"You shouldn't have bothered about your promise. The Sisters who instruct you have told you so. They

are very pious women. Why don't you follow their advice? You would avoid trouble!"

"I am drawn there by something that makes me go," she answered.

"Take care," he warned her, "many people suspect that you and your parents are making a profit out of this. Don't your parents expect to better their position by making use of your apparitions? Aren't your apparitions just dreams, or, worse still, lies?"

"I don't expect any profit in this life," she answered. "I haven't lied, either to the people who were kind to me, or to anyone else."

"Will you promise me," he persisted, "will you promise that you will not go to the grotto any more?"

But she would not.

"Then," he said to her, "we will put you in jail and you will not be able to go."

"If I cannot go," she answered, "then I will not."

He let her leave then. He was convinced that she was not an impostor and for the time being he made no further objection to her visits to the grotto.

From his office she went directly to church, but this day of difficulty was far from finished.

M. Dominique Jacomet, the Commissioner of Police, decided to take a hand in the case, and sent word for the town crier, Pierre Callet, to come to him at his office at home. At that time there was no police bureau, only one room at the town hall where drunkards were locked up; but the Commissioner's residence was large. M. Estrade and his sister lived there as well as Abbé Pène, a teacher of physics, and his sister. M. Jacomet's own family was not large, consisting only of his wife and a small adopted child — presumably the one who knit the stockings that were given to Bernadette's little brother.

M. Jacomet at thirty-six was notable in his community. He was quite handsome, with black hair above a finely shaped forehead. He was jolly, kind, honest, religious, honorable and dignified — very dignified. A distinguished-looking man, he wore his dress uniform perfectly and when he rose in court "he looked like the king's attorney." He was not afraid of the other lawyers, either, and answered their questions laughingly. He was as polite to the plain people as he was to the mighty, and whenever he went to a town he went first to see the priest. He was not a radical, and received his greatest advancement at a time when liberal opinions were looked on with disfavor. In Lourdes it was recalled that during the cholera epidemic he had been tireless and fearless in the care of the sick.

With all that, he seems to have been feared as well as admired. "He never," it was said, "failed to punish those who infringed the law. And he possessed a faculty for trapping those from whom he was not able to get a simple confession. He persuaded where he could, but if persuasion failed, he fell back on threats."

"M. Callet," he said to the summoned town crier on the day of which we speak, "it seems that this Bernadette is at church and I should like to know her. Come with me." So they went and waited outside until, among the crowd coming out from the church, could be seen Bernadette with her relatives. M. Callet pointed her out, and M. Jacomet, who was in civilian clothes, walked over to her and touched her on the arm. "Will you follow me," he said.

"Wherever you wish, sir," she answered.

Her friends and relatives walked behind at a distance. As the party was about to pass the town hall (where the room for drunkards was), her friends cried, "Poor little

Bernadette, they are going to show you the inside of that prison! How cruel the Commissioner is!"

But the Commissioner walked on very seriously and did not answer. He was magnificent, thought M. Callet. When they reached his house, he turned to the relatives who followed and said with much authority, "There is nothing for you to see here," and to Bernadette, "Follow me!"

Then Bernadette and the Commissioner entered the office and shut the door.

He motioned her to take a chair and, drawing up to the table where he had pencil and paper, he began to question her.

Meanwhile Madame Jacomet had run to get Mademoiselle Estrade, who in turn had called her brother to see the child, "who had seen the Virgin Mary." M. Estrade slipped in and seated himself at a slight distance. It is to M. Estrade and Mademoiselle Estrade that we are indebted for an account of this interview, since no report by the Commissioner ever came to light.

Bernadette sat in her ragged capulet, her hands folded on her knees, and her head slightly bent to her chest. Her voice was hoarse.

"Tell me, Bernadette Soubirous (since that is your name), is it true that you see a lady in the grotto?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very beautiful?"

"Yes, sir, very beautiful."

And he asked her leading questions about the apparitions and he wrote down the answers. "You see, I am writing down everything that you tell me. We will see if you are telling the truth. But beware if you are lying! Come! It is best for you to admit that you have been lying if you do not wish to go to prison!"

"I am not lying to you, sir."

And then he pretended to threaten her by his looks and gestures as he talked to her. He would change her story around and misquote her, but she was quick to catch him.

"I never said that, sir," she would challenge him. She was not upset and her story was always the same.

After a while the door of the office opened, and a working man put his head timidly in. "What do you want?" asked the Commissioner.

"I am the father of the child," he answered.

"I am glad you have come," the Commissioner said. "This comedy must be ended, for it constitutes a real danger to the peace of the town. I warn you that if you have not enough authority to keep your child from going to the grotto, I shall have cause to shut her up elsewhere."

François was indeed frightened, for this was a thinly veiled threat to put her in a hospital for the mentally incompetent. And so he promised, "We will see that she does not go near the Massabielle any more."

In the end both the Commissioner and M. Estrade were impressed by Bernadette. "The child is of good faith," said M. Estrade. "Her story has a touch of the extraordinary, but she might be misled." *

During the interview with the Commissioner, Madame Jacomet and Callet had been keeping watch in the outer room. But Madame Jacomet was human, she listened through the keyhole, as she smiled with a sort of mischievous smile.

* M. Estrade was also to be her biographer, but he wrote twenty years after these events, and his book is more interesting than exact. He, like Dr. Dozous, gives many little human scenes left out by later and more elaborate biographers.

As Bernadette and her father left the room, they were stopped by the sister of Abbé Bertrand Pène, who asked Bernadette to come talk to her brother. At first she hesitated, but finally succumbed to their insistence. She went into their salon and told her story quite naturally, quite unafraid, and, the Abbé Pène says, "with an indifference as though she were fulfilling a duty."

This manner was later noted by many, and it is certainly not to be wondered at. The long hours of questioning and the constant repetition of these accounts of the apparitions were to be her lot in life. It is said she never refused to answer a direct question from a person who had the right to ask, but that she never volunteered a comment unquestioned. Certainly in the latter part of her life she expended great energy in trying to avoid situations in which these questions would be inevitable.

To have made a good impression on the Abbé Pène was her good fortune. He remained her champion from that time on, a time when she sorely needed a champion. And he had the ear of Curé Peyramale, the pastor of the parish.

On that evening of which we speak when Bernadette and her father returned home, she was to meet the hardest opposition of all. Her mother's sobs were terribly distressing to Bernadette. "They will jail us all if Bernadette goes back to the grotto."

"Then I must either disobey you or the Lady," she answered.

M. Jacomet spent the evening at the little local club of liberal thinkers. M. Estrade was there. The intelligence and wit of the community were present. M. Jacomet made a good yarn of it. He told of his questions and of

Bernadette's replies, and he laughed, delighted, over his defeat by such a child.

Bernadette had indeed triumphed over Commissioner Jacomet, but he did not yet know to what extent. Twenty years later, in the place of honor, on the chimney-breast in the room where he had questioned her, surrounded by saintly pictures, was the picture of Sœur Marie-Bernard. But on February 21, 1858, none of the actors in this drama could very well imagine such a thing.

Bernadette's family were now genuinely alarmed ; they had been threatened by the police, and they were conscious that they were under surveillance. They were, as the police put it, "watched attentively." Furthermore friends dropped in with good advice. Fanny Nicolau, went to the Soubirous' house. The neighbors were all there, and apparently the discussion became heated.

Fanny urged the parents not to let Bernadette go to the grotto. The neighbors said, "Who are you to prevent the child from performing her duty? The Lady told her to come for a fortnight!"

"Will you go to jail for her then?" Fanny countered.

Monday morning Bernadette was sent to school although she wanted to go to the grotto. The family watched her to the Hospice and the Sisters, who were at least tacitly in league with the police, watched her at school. The Sisters scolded and argued ; the children taunted and jeered.

Only one person seems to have stood by her. Abbé Pomian said to her specifically, "They have no right to prevent you from going." As her spiritual advisor he did not forbid her going either then or at any other time during the apparitions.

Meanwhile people had gone to the grotto in even larger crowds than before, and when Bernadette did not come they scattered but could hardly be said to have dispersed. Marie Segot, a very religious spinster who worked at the monastery was one of these. She waited on the

road with a friend and when Bernadette did not come she went to the house to discover the reason. Bernadette's mother was sitting on the door step, her own pretty blond head bent over the curly blond head of her youngest child.

Bernadette came back to eat her midday meal and as she started out to school again she tried to go down the road to the bridge, but she was brought back by her father and started on the way to school. She was sad and perplexed. It is useless to argue against a compulsive necessity. She had walked almost all the way to school, and was standing at the foot of a short road to the convent within visual range of the police barracks when suddenly her compulsion was too strong for her. It seemed to her that an invisible barrier lay across the road in the direction of the school. She found herself unable to move her legs unless to go to the grotto.

She turned, and followed by some of the other school children, started down the hill intending to reach the bridge by the lower road that did not lead past her own house.

Two *gendarmes*, who had been assigned the duty of watching her and had seen her turn about, came out and joined her. One walked on either side of her. People began to call to each other and a number who had been waiting at the fork of the road ran to spread the news.

Sergeant D'Angla had the news by now, and followed quickly. People gathered miraculously in groups and knots. "'Tis she! 'Tis she," they called, as they saw her accompanied by the police and followed by a crowd of children. They went around under the fort, and across the bridge and up the steep hill from which the path would lead down to the grotto.

Suddenly she stopped. "Go fetch my godmother's blessed candle. I need it," she said to someone. The procession paused to wait while some ran down the hill to get good places. Bernadette was entirely calm and self-possessed.

The policemen were irritated. "Is it possible," they were heard to exclaim, "that in the nineteenth century we should be expected to believe in such superstitions?" But this did not dishearten the crowd.

The aunt came with the candle and the party went on. It now consisted of about one hundred people, mostly women and girls with some small boys.

Bernadette knelt and lighted the candle. The *gendarmes*, who were standing a short way off, had been joined by Sergeant D'Angla. They did not disturb her during her prayer and she recited her rosary.

"Do you see her?" one of the *gendarmes* asked her.

"No, that officer is there. I cannot see anything."

M. D'Angla was put out. "If I look like a devil, I am at least a good devil!" he said. "If you were not a silly child you would know that the Blessed Virgin is not afraid of the police. Why are you so afraid of them yourself? Is it because you are a liar? I look as intently as you do, and I see nothing." He laughed and tapped her on the shoulder.

She did not remain long after that. The Lady would not come. And finally she left without seeing her.

The crowd was astonished. "The *gendarmes* have been able to keep her White Lady away," they snickered.

She walked toward the Savy Mill and there met her mother who had been told of her visit to the grotto, and they went into the mill to avoid the crowd. Louise was very pale, she was perspiring freely and looking with great distress at Bernadette.

Someone who did not know her asked her if she knew the child.

"I am the unhappy mother!"

"But why unhappy?"

"You see what is happening. Some people snicker at us. Some are kind and tell us that the child's mind is sick. The police are threatening to put us in jail. But she will go to the grotto! She is impelled by a power that she cannot explain." Louise was really suffering. She loved her daughter, and her daughter was an object of scorn.

They walked back to town, the child weeping quietly. And her father seeing her and feeling her distress, thought a moment and said, "Very well, since you cannot resist the force that calls you, you have my consent. After this you may go."

Other people were of many minds. Some said that she should have gone at her usual time; some that it would be the end of the apparitions. At the club there was great sport. "The Lady," they said, "is afraid of the police and with only a little further activity on the part of our clever Jacomet she will decide to climb down from her rock and go some place else to live." And they were much amused.

The Commissioner of Police, M. Jacomet, was not amused. He could see nothing in this last visit of Bernadette to the grotto but a flouting of his authority, and certainly he had not emerged the victor on Sunday when the underfed, sickly peasant child had sat unafraid in his presence and matched her wits with his. M. Jacomet had a reputation to sustain. Criminals quailed before him and slipped his knots tightly around themselves while attempting to undo them. This had not happened to Bernadette. He was annoyed, and issued or-

ders for a complete secret surveillance. Each step of the father and mother was dogged ; the other children were cleverly questioned and at night their doors and windows were watched. Worst of all, false friends offered them money. The old scandal of the unproven theft was re-circulated.

M. Jacomet knew his people well. He reported to his superior that the child's words were just so many words but "the people in the country round about take them seriously, and the people go to the Massabielle each morning convinced that they are thereby performing an act of devotion." The officials of the town were just as aroused as the most uneducated people, but their activity took the form of sending reports. Reports flew in all directions to officers beyond the precincts of Lourdes by whom they were received with astonishment and often laughter. To the outside world it was a tempest in a teacup. But to Lourdes it was an earthquake.

M. Peyramale, the curé of the parish, had as yet paid no official attention to what was going on. He, himself, did not wish to be seen at the grotto. But he did wish a report. So the Curé suggested to M. Estrade that he accompany his sister to the grotto and see what he could see.

In order to get a good position at the grotto it was necessary now to go before daybreak and of course at such a time of day a lady of Mademoiselle Estrade's standing could hardly go unaccompanied. They made a picnic of it, although the sister and her friends protested that M. Estrade would be impressed. "Have you brought your opera glasses?" he called. "Are you well supplied with holy water? Has one of you a candle?" and they laughed at his jests.

The Seventh Apparition, Tuesday, February 23rd

At the grotto some two hundred people had already arrived. Many women were on their knees praying.

"I had great difficulty to keep myself from laughing on seeing the childish belief of these simple Christians," said M. Estrade. But he was bolstered up by seeing several other gentlemen of the better class who had also "obliged their friends" by going to the grotto. There were Dr. Dozous, M. Dufo, a barrister, and M. de Lafitte, who once had been commissariat officer. They explored the grotto while they waited.

Then a murmur went through the crowd ; the ranks opened and Bernadette came through to her accustomed place. The people became silent as with one hand she took the lighted candle, with the other her rosary, and slowly and with great grace made the sign of the cross. She had said perhaps the first ten beads when suddenly she stopped. Her whole person became transfigured. She smiled, and her face became radiant. Then spontaneously and without a thought of their dignity, the hats of the scoffing gentlemen came off and they knelt with the humble folk who prayed.

She gazed at the niche. Sometimes her lips moved, but the people could hear nothing. Sometimes she listened, for the apparition was speaking to her. It was telling her three secrets for her ears alone, and which she never divulged. The crowd gazed at her as she gazed at the niche ; but when they looked at the niche they saw nothing "other than the dead branches of an old rose-bush." Nevertheless they were convinced that her eyes did see something — that there stood there some mysterious person with whom she conversed.

She sighed and the people were sad. She smiled and they drew a deep breath. "I have seen Madame Rachel," said M. Estrade, "and she was a magnificent actress, but she is far beneath Bernadette. Only," he added, "Bernadette is not an actress, she truly sees a supernatural being and talks with it. Her transformed appearance proves it! But it is indeed beyond human understanding."

After about an hour the apparition vanished.

Bernadette was asked, "Was her voice pleasant?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Have you ever heard a voice like hers?"

"Oh, no! Her voice is soft and delicate" (*fin* which is used in that dialect to mean childlike).

"In what language did she speak?"

"I don't know. But I know that I understood her."

Fanny Nicolau, after much changing of her mind, had finally gone first to Mass and then to the Massabielle.

"Who taught you how to bow so graciously?" she asked Bernadette.

"I do not know how I bow," she answered. "The Lady bows to me, and I bow back."

"Who taught you to make such nice signs of the cross?"

"I do not know how I make the sign of the cross, the Lady makes one and I do likewise!"

That evening Mademoiselle Estrade "led by pious curiosity" went to the home of Bernadette to see her again. She found her sitting before a half-dead fire in a room of her cousin, André Sajoux, on the second floor, holding a baby on her knees. She had been given this room by André because the life of the other family had to go for-

ward somehow. There were so many with "pious curiosity," and the room on the ground floor was unsuitable for such visits.

At home again Fanny Nicolau was thinking it over : the Massabielle, and a transformed child who bowed and smiled with infinite grace. "And I said to myself, 'There is something extraordinary going on there !' "

The Eighth Apparition, Wednesday, February 24th

The next morning at daybreak Fanny Nicolau was the first person at the grotto. She placed herself under the rock that foots the niche where the rosebush grew. Once there had been a sort of mossy lawn there, and around it a bit of green grass. All that was gone — tracked and destroyed.

A little group soon joined her : M. and Madame Dufo, Mademoiselle Estrade (her brother was away on business that day), and Dominique Cazenave. Some place else, in the crowd that was gathering, was Antoinette Garros, and Sister Marie of the Sisters of the Assumption. In the crowd there were many complete strangers.

There was also a little group of officials headed by Sergeant D'Angla, amongst them M. Malé and M. Callet who, in addition to being the town crier, was also keeper of the commonlands.

These officials were not unsympathetic. They let the people pray on the road, and they returned lost rosaries and sacred objects. Many of them even went in the evening to the grotto to pray. And they were as eager to see Bernadette and as full of "pious curiosity" as anyone else. When Bernadette lost a little bag with a book and a picture of Christ in it, M. Malé went out of his

way to give it back to her. "Thus I had the occasion to talk to her."

By many writers M. D'Angla is assigned the rôle of the devil in the piece. But after the heat of battle has passed away it is hard to see in his actions more than the conflicted behavior of a man whose intellectual concepts were being upset by an emotional experience.

Most of the crowd was completely in sympathy with Bernadette. Some were not. Sometimes coarse words were called by the crowd; the police stopped this where they could, but of course all of it could not be stopped.

On the morning of Wednesday the 24th four or five hundred people had gathered when the little girl came. She walked and behaved as though the large audience were not there. The candle was lighted, she took it in one hand, her rosary in the other, and lifting her eyes to the niche, began to pray.

When she reached the tenth bead a change came over her face. She became very white, her eyes wide open, her lips purple, with a smile on them. "It was as though," said Mademoiselle Cazenave, "a cloud had passed over her face — I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me! Then she began to smile beautifully and make graceful bows without moving her gaze from above. Her eyes were opened naturally but they had a steady gaze, without blinking."

And then, moved by some emotion, she began to weep. The change in her face was so striking that Fanny Nicolau wept also. Madame Dufo began to weep unrestrainedly, and M. Dufo was so moved by it that he had to leave. There was a general cry, "Heavens, she is going to die!"

And then Bernadette rose from her usual place at five

or six yards from the niche and started walking slowly toward the grotto as though she were looking for some lost object.* She came back and knelt again, and again she smiled, and at that moment someone touched the rosebush. "Who touched the rosebush?" she called, for the Lady had disappeared.

After that the Lady appeared and disappeared four or five times. The smile would leave Bernadette's face and "each time it seemed," said Fanny Nicolau, "as though a fine white muslin ceased to cover her face," which would regain its natural color and tears would fall.

M. D'Angla, apparently wanting to test the depth of her trance state, approached her in one of them. "You queer child," he said, "what is it that you see?" But she did not answer for in these states, it was testified by many, she never answered anyone. She remained without making a movement or turning her eyes.

The apparition lasted for about an hour. After it was over as she left in the crowd M. D'Angla stopped her again. "You saw the Lady as much as I did," he said. This time she saw and heard him, but still she did not answer.

On the way home she was overtaken by Fanny Nicolau, by Sister Marie and Mademoiselle Estrade. Sister Marie asked her, "Why do you speak in such a low voice?"

"I spoke in a loud voice," she answered in astonish-

* M. Estrade, who was not at the apparition of February 24 says that Bernadette said three times distinctly, "Penitence, penitence, penitence." He learned this, he says, from someone other than his sister who was too far away from Bernadette to hear the words. M. Estrade was never conceded by Père Cros to have been very accurate. He is not so much to blame for things that he had forgotten in the interval of twenty years between the events and his writing, as for the things that he "remembered." Later writers added that she crawled up to the grotto kissing the earth at each step. There is no basis for any of this in the contemporary evidence taken by the commission appointed by the Church.

ment, "just as I am talking to you now. Didn't you hear me?"

Fanny asked her, "Did she speak in French or in patois?"

"How could she have spoken French with me," she exclaimed, "I don't understand French! She talked to me in patois. And she used *vous* when speaking to me." Fanny Nicolau was much impressed by this — that the apparition should show such respect for this child as to address her with the formal mode of address. Then Mademoiselle Estrade asked her what was the cause of her tears. But she did not remember having wept.

On Bernadette's way home from school that day, as she passed the house of a certain Madame Dupas, this woman called her inside to tell her story to her husband who had not yet seen the girl. Neighbor women flocked in, and they asked her many questions.

Finally one woman said to her in parting, "May I kiss you? I may never have the happiness of seeing the Blessed Virgin; let me kiss you who see her."

In the church, at twilight, the vestry door was open, and beyond it the Curé Peyramale was walking, walking back and forth.

The Curé Peyramale still did not know what to think. He realized more clearly than anyone else the far-reaching effects of these apparitions if they once had the sanction of the Church. He decided to steer a middle course : he neither went to the grotto nor forbade others to go.

Victoire Bonnacarrère, a servant at Tarbes, had been in his parish in another town. She came to Lourdes, and on the evening of the 24th she went to see her former pastor, to get his impression and his consent to go to the grotto. "They are laughing at the apparitions in Tarbes," she told him. But he told her to go and see for herself the next morning, and he pointed out to her the road that she would have to take. "Some here are edified, some outraged," he said, and asked her to report to him what she saw and thought.

A good many people in Lourdes had not yet gone to the grotto, and in spite of the violence and excitement of those who had gone and who did consider the apparition to be the Blessed Virgin, were not yet convinced. Mademoiselle Elfrida Lacrampe was one of these. All her friends urged her to go. "Mademoiselle, go there," M. Estrade had said, "and I assure you that after having seen Bernadette in ecstasy you too will share our conviction. It is impossible that Mademoiselle Rachel herself, even, ever held on the stage as beautiful poses as Bernadette does at the grotto."

Everyone was forever comparing Bernadette to the great tragedienne. And that annoyed Mademoiselle Lacrampe more than ever. She could not make herself go. She was convinced, to be sure, that God could do in the present anything that he had done in the past; she did not believe His power was diminished, but she was thoroughly skeptical that the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette at the Grotto of the Massabielle. Finally, more to yield to the insistence of her friends than to satisfy herself, she decided to go. It was Thursday, the 25th, that she selected.

The Ninth Apparition, Thursday, February 25th

It was bitter cold. Mademoiselle Lacrampe started while it was still dark, carrying a lantern and feeling her way over the cobblestones and through the ruts of the wood road. Many people were on the way down. She put herself near the place where Bernadette knelt, facing it, about three yards away. The entire surrounding grounds were full of people, but on this morning the rocks at least were unoccupied. Everyone pushed everyone else, jockeying for space.

Up in town Bernadette had not yet started. A hundred or more people had gathered in the narrow street by her door, among them M. Callet to whom the police had assigned the job of secretly observing her. What he did, mainly, was to guard her and push a way for her through the crowds. Some relative always went along also. That particular morning it was her godmother, Aunt Bernarde. The crowd was waiting very quietly when she appeared to go with the collected escort to the grotto.

When they reached the steep incline, M. Callet called out, "Stand back! Bernadette is here!"

Bernadette walking through the crowd said, "Let me pass ! Let me pass !" And then, pulling her dress away so that it would not get soiled, she knelt in her accustomed place, pushed her hood back so that it would not obstruct her vision, and began to pray.

The people crowded about her, kneeling in the mud, and the terrible quiet descended on them.

"It was extraordinary, that silence of such a populace," said M. Callet. "At least three-quarters were on their knees. I did not get on my knees at first — but I had my cap in my hands. Very few did not bare their heads. It touched my heart ; it was as if I were in church."

Mademoiselle Lacrampe's heart was not touched. She called Bernadette's voice impatient, as though Bernadette were thinking, "What could you see if you did not let me pass !" And she saw only vanity in her arrangement of her garments.

As Bernadette began to pray she took her rosary and made the sign of the cross — that gesture so admired by everyone else — but she held the cross up side down ! a thing which horrified Mademoiselle Lacrampe. Then as Bernadette began to pray, fixing her eyes on the niche, Mademoiselle Lacrampe waited for that transfiguration to take place ; that beauty of pose that was to rival the greatest tragedienne of her age. "I looked intently, and I saw nothing. Her face was the same as when I first saw her, and there were no tears !"

Hardly had Bernadette reached the tenth bead of her rosary, however, when she started crawling on her knees up the slope. Then looking steadfastly and waiting, she retraced her steps and went down to the riverside. Then pausing as though she had been called, and looking back, she started again up the slope on her knees in the mud. When she reached the arch of the grotto she

pushed away the branches of the rosebush which fell over the entrance and went in on her knees.

At that time the opening of the grotto was somewhat obstructed by an accumulation of rock and sand washed up by the river, so that the inside floor was lower than the threshold. She paused and looked for a moment at a little inner opening to the upper niche and then continued on her knees to the back of the grotto at her left.

The crowd pressed after her moving those rosebush vines carelessly, and for a troubled instant she looked back. They watched her in complete bewilderment. They saw her creep along and stop and stare at a spot where there was muddy earth and a few sprigs of a frail saxifrage, commonly called *la dorine*. With her face turned, as though listening, to the lower entrance to the niche, she began to dig with her hands in the mud. Three times she lifted the muddy water in her hands and tried to make herself drink it — but she could not. And then once again she tried and succeeded.

Without glancing at the people, she handed one of them the candle and dipping her hands in the muddy water rubbed it over her face, and then picking up the skirt of her coat wiped her face. Then reaching for the saxifrage she gathered a bit of it and ate it, and, taking her candle back in her hand, crept out of the grotto (the crowd retreating before her), and back down the steep rocky incline.

They cried, "She is mad" — and the women wept and picked up their aprons and wiped the streaming tears from their eyes. "She is mad!"

For fear she might fall, her godmother stayed very close to her. As she descended she kissed the earth many times and the aunt wiped the mud from the child's face.

Those who were near saw Bernadette make a gesture

with her hands and interpreted it to mean that they were all to kneel. "On your knees! Everyone!" they shouted. Victoire Bonnacarrère was watching her. "I saw her making that gesture as if to order everyone to kneel. That did not edify me; and I did not kneel."

Bernadette remained kneeling but a few moments and then joined the sentry and started back toward Lourdes. And they all reproved her and people laughed and made fun of her as though it were a comedy, so that she walked fast.

"The Lady told me to drink water from the spring," she explained. "But since I didn't see any, I went to drink at the Gave. Then she told me that that was not the place and she made a sign to me with her finger showing me the spring and I saw only a little dirty water."

Down at the grotto her friends and admirers were stupefied. "Bernadette is mad!" And with sadness in her heart Mademoiselle Estrade took the road back to Lourdes with her brother and Mademoiselle Lacrampe.

"But could those smiles, those manifestations, this magnificence which seemed to descend from heaven, be the result of a sick mind? Were the acts of the child, the divine tableau she portrayed, the sign of the cross she made, caused by insanity?" M. Estrade in turn was becoming bewildered and really did not know what to think. Mademoiselle Lacrampe did not believe that the child was insane, nor did she believe that Bernadette wished to deceive, but the idea that the Blessed Virgin was present at those exercises seemed quite ridiculous to her. "It would have been much better if you had let me stay at home. At first I believed very little and now I believe even less. This is what you have accomplished," she exclaimed to the Estrades.

Victoire went back to the Curé Peyramale to report. "I didn't believe in it before I came to Lourdes ! This little girl is not extraordinary. I did not see anything to make this child put on an act like that. And that order to kneel seemed quite funny to me. I said to myself, 'She must be rather stupid to imagine that she can give orders like that, and moreover when she is all covered with mud !' " She then confessed herself to Father Peyramale and she said, "O, Father, I felt very much out of place down there : I regret having wasted time there. Coming into the church I feel that I am with the good God : down there I was outraged."

The Curé answered, "Very well, very well. There are some even among the men who are edified ; but others have been impressed like you."

Victoire did not go to any more of the apparitions although she later visited the grotto out of curiosity. She said that later the Curé tried to show her why she should have faith in it, but at that he hardly urged her. He said to her, "You must ask for faith."

At the end of the day Bernadette had stopped to see Abbé Pène who had so strongly upheld her. "I hear you ate grass just like the animals," he twitted her. And she returned home very much depressed.

At Commissioner Jacomet's house the Estrades and Mademoiselle Lacrampe were comparing notes with the Commissioner's wife. "The sainted Virgin," Madame Jacomet mocked, "comes from heaven to beg Mademoiselle Soubirous to do her the favor of visiting her at Massabielle," and they laughed heartily. As for the Estrades, they still believed and still hoped. But the occurrences of that day had armed M. Jacomet against them, and they did not know what to say.

Meanwhile, Bernadette had gone directly up to the village to explain her behavior to the Curé Peyramale. And, "Though he is so good," she said, "I am more afraid of him than a *gendarme*." The Abbé Pomian was charming, frank, open-minded and good company, but M. Peyramale was cold and stern ; he was more respected than liked. Sergeant D'Angla complains that during the period of the apparitions the Curé would not discuss the subject, and if it were discussed would only go away shrugging his shoulders.

The officials of the city kept a careful reserve, although in private they admitted that they were skeptical. But the clergy were the most reserved of any, and the Curé Peyramale the most reserved of all.

What Sergeant D'Angla did not seem to realize was that Father Peyramale was in a very difficult predicament. It had always been his custom to dine with the city officials and with the intelligentsia of the little town. Now, such a visit would have been taken as being "pro-apparition" or "anti-apparition," in accordance with the convictions expressed by each official. And every one of them did express convictions. It is said that finally the Curé refused to go outside his own doors.

Furthermore, he himself could not decide whether the child was the recipient of an angelic visit or the victim of an hallucination. And his Bishop, Monseigneur Laurence, would not decide for him ; many reports had been sent to the Bishop as to the other absent authorities, but apparently he had come to the same conclusion as M. Clarens, the schoolmaster, that the only reasonable thing to do was "to wait and to doubt."

If those who had taken upon themselves the rôle of investigators had not rushed away from the grotto so

quickly that Thursday, they would have been even more disturbed, although perhaps a little comforted. Several women whose faith had not been shaken by the sight of the child putting mud on her face stayed to count their beads, and it was then that they noticed that the little hole dug by Bernadette with her hands had become larger.

In the afternoon curious prowlers found that a puddle of water was gradually covering the ground around the little hole. It is possible that they dug a bit more at it, or perhaps Bernadette's removal of the first obstacle of mud was sufficient to liberate the water, for during the night as the mud settled, the hole became a basin, the muddy water cleared; the basin overflowed, and a little stream trickled down over the pebbles on its way to the Gave — and to an astonishing fame.

The Tenth Apparition, Friday, February 26th

Many people who ordinarily would have gone on about their business remained in Lourdes that night and the country round about was also astir. One group left Saint-Pé an hour after midnight but when, at three a.m., they reached the grotto they found there another group of three women who had come from Omex.

The people from Omex had started at two. It was raining, and as they were the first arrivals and alone they took shelter under the edge of the rock below the little niche where the apparition appeared. But they were not very happy; they were afraid. At intervals they heard something like a rumbling from the interior of the grotto, and this frightened them again. It was really the echo from carts passing along the road on the far side

of the river ; but these people were not in a mood to be reasonable. They passed the time in praying.

The crowd continued to grow. Not all prayed ; many were derisive ; and some said that the apparition was evil, and that perhaps they should not have come at all. In the dim light of the rainy dawn more and more people could now be seen. They filled the space before the grotto and clambered over the rocks. They clung to the bushes and shrubs and slipped into the icy waters of the Gave from the rocks at its edge.

By the time Bernadette arrived some eight hundred people had packed themselves into this narrow space. The crowd which accompanied Bernadette was added to the throng.

She knelt and began the rosary, then her face changed and the observers knew that she was seeing the apparition. First she bent forward slightly, then more and more until finally she was almost touching the ground. She seemed overcome with joy, and a little burst of childish laughter came from her lips. Then her expression changed and tears coursed down her cheeks. Two or three times she made little moaning sounds like the sounds of an infant just beginning to babble. And then bowing very low she began climbing on her knees and kissing the ground. She trembled slightly all over, and continued to climb and to make the little sounds.

When she reached the top of the incline she stopped and, facing the crowd, put one finger on her lips and stretching out her arm with a very energetic gesture signalled everyone to bow. But many remained motionless. She repeated the gesture with great energy and irritation. It was then that everyone bowed and kissed the earth. The densely packed crowd swayed — everyone

moved. "*Het plaça ! het plaça !*" (make room), they said to each other.

Bernadette stooped and went inside the cave, washed herself at the spring, ate some of the herb and then went back down, still on her knees, to the rock where she usually knelt. When she reached there she kissed this stone also.

Lucile Casterot, one of the aunts who was with her, could stand no more : with a scream she fainted. And Bernadette drawn out of her absorption by this occurrence was lifted up by women who wiped the mud from her face.

Aunt Bernarde was also sorely tried. "I did not look at anyone. I did not want to look : I thought, 'the good God is still in the heavens ; if this is a misfortune we will have to bear it !' "

On her way back home Bernadette sat on a rock to rest. She had as usual a very bad palpitation of the heart, and her cough was troubling her. The Lady had told her to kiss the earth for sinners and she had done so.

During that day the little fountain became bigger and by the next morning, because the crowd continually worked at it, it was quite a large sized pool.

A number of years later writers discussing the spring stated that it had not been there previous to the moment when Bernadette turned to it. It has repeatedly been called miraculous in that respect. But the account of Père Cros says,* "When one studies the history of the happenings at Lourdes in primitive and authentic documents, one wonders, with surprise, how the difficulty

* *Histoire de Notre-Dame de Lourdes*, by L.-J.-M. Cros, S.J., 3 vols. Paris, 1925, vol. I, p. 273.

could have arisen. . . The opinion which makes the fountain of the Massabielle a fountain miraculous in its origin, and holds that it sprang for the first time on the 25th of February, is one of relatively modern date. [He was writing previous to 1879.] The real truth is that the fountain of the Massabielle was, before the 25th of February 1858, what it is today, (but) it had not yet been fully revealed and enriched with a miraculous virtue."

The Abbé Pomian was also always convinced that there was a spring there before the apparitions. Honest and serious men known well by him had assured him that they had drunk there; that one only had to dig a little there to find water. The Pujo family, who had always known this grotto, said that there had always been a little water there, perhaps a plateful sometimes, sometimes more. They had even seen it flow outside the grotto.

A description of the conformation of the land there will help a bit. The grotto faced the river and the river washed gravel into the mouth of the grotto, or again washed it away. Under the gravel and trash there was a bed of "mud good for making statuary." It was at this level and in front of the grotto that the spring existed. When the river washed deposits there, the stream either seeped away into the sand or back against the rock and was forced upward to the spot where Bernadette found it. The amount of visible water varied. Today with the floor of the grotto cleared and very much lower the spring does not flow from the rear of the grotto, but from a place in front of it. And even today, in spite of every preventive measure, much of it is lost in the sand and slips away into the Gave.

Abbé Richard, perhaps the best known hydro-geologist

of his time, examined it. He found the rock of the Massabieille and the little mountain above it "naturally made to hide fountains," and he adds that had he seen it the first time without previous knowledge of its history he would have been able to say, "There is a fountain there."

To quote again from the *Histoire* * : "The pre-existence of the fountain is established by facts and positive evidence. . . And nevertheless the fountain is miraculous : it is so for the very same reason that so many other venerated fountains are, and even for better reasons — it has been revealed by the apparition."

This opinion was essentially that of the Bishop in his pronouncement in 1862.

* Cros, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 283.

M. Clarens, the young schoolmaster, had not intended to go to the grotto. But what was the use ! One could not sleep. The continuous din of *sabots* clattering on the cobblestones woke him whether he went or did not go. He was reminded of the verse of Boileau :

"Is it then to lie awake
That one goes to bed in Paris ?"

Finally prompted by irritation as much as by curiosity, or at least so he says, he arose and dressed and set out. "Each day one was told in spite of oneself what was happening at the grotto. You were deafened by a thousand and one stories without being able to defend yourself."

People had told him that there were at least six persons to the square meter there, but he felt sure that from ten to twelve were packed in each such space. At least, "I suppose that the bodies were there too ; it is true that I saw only heads, and these heads would turn toward the west with a single movement, for a second, then toward the east. . ."

M. Clarens was so intent on the art of stating his own reactions that he did not add much to the sum of knowledge. But he does give a very vivid picture of the way in which people were reacting to the apparitions.

The Commissioner's report of the same day is terser :

"Saturday, Feb. 27th, the same stage setting, the same exercises ; but still more of the curious."

The Eleventh Apparition, Saturday, February 27th

Bernadette's godmother gives a description of what she saw : "When the moment had come to ascend on her knees, Bernadette, without turning her head, put down the candle and climbed, her hands joined, holding the rosary. She went straight toward the niche close against the rock. Several times along the way she kissed the ground, unclasping her hands and putting them on the ground then lifting her head quite quickly and re-joining her hands. By the rock she sometimes paused a little. Then she turned around and descended rapidly in the same manner, kissing the ground several times without ever looking at anyone. She got back to her place and again looked at the niche ; we then gave her back the candle. The apparition over, she arose." *

Pierre Callet whose duty it was to give a daily account of her to the Commissioner was more sympathetic than most. He seems to have seen what so few did : that these apparitions constituted a severe strain on such a frail person. He repeatedly said, "This little girl is going to die." Her face was pale, her lips slightly red ; he could not hear her breathing. He had the feeling that her spirit was not hers, that it was with the apparition. "She was like a stake planted there," he said, and she did not turn her head or move her knees about although she knelt on a stone. He never heard her speak, although once he heard her laugh while she was gazing at her Lady. He did not see her make any gestures except when the rosebush was touched, and then she seemed as though she might cry, or even that she was very angry.

* It is very commonly stated that on this date, Feb. 27th, Bernadette was given the mission of asking the clergy to build a chapel. Père Cros (op. cit., vol. I, page 333), states, "It is . . . March 2nd that, the Lady, for the first time, asked for the construction of a chapel."

On this February 27th, M. Clarens, the schoolmaster, made an additional note of interest : a little stream of limpid water trickled from the corner of the grotto. It was on this day, perhaps, that one Jeanne Monat had an inspiration. Because she had been afraid of the apparitions at the grotto she had always brought with her as a precaution a vial of holy water. Her friends laughed at her about it. But on this day she emptied the vial onto the ground of the cavern and filled it with water from the spring. She was perhaps the first person to do that.

Some years before this time, a stone cutter, Louis Bouriette and his brother Joseph, had been in an explosion in the slate quarry. Joseph was killed and Louis thrown across his brother's body where he lay unconscious for several hours. He was badly burned and his face and eyes were scarred by the flying stone. For three months, through shock, he lay in delirium. He was never able to return to work and Dr. Dozous observed that the lower part of the cornea of the right eye was badly damaged. Dr. Dozous advised him to adjust his mind to the necessities of blindness, saying that neither the eye nor the shock were amenable to science.

But Louis Bouriette heard of the miraculous spring and sent his daughter for a vial of the water. "For if it is the Blessed Virgin," he said, "if it be she, she has only to will it and I will be healed."

It was on that day, February 27th, that the daughter went for the water and he washed his eyes. While he was bathing the eye, the light increased and he cried, "I can see ! I am cured !"

Dr. Dozous assured him that he could not see. He covered the good eye with his hand, and, having scribbled on a piece of paper the pompous phrase, "Bouriette has

an incurable amaurosis, and shall never be cured" held it in front of the injured eye. "Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet," as one of the writers puts it, "the doctor could not have been more surprised than when, without hesitation, Bouriette read it."

The Twelfth Apparition, Sunday, February 28th

It was raining still on Sunday but the crowd was so great that in order to get any position at all it had been necessary to spend the night. Someone calculated that there were about two thousand people packed on that small and slippery spot, standing on every available inch of ground and hanging from rocks and bushes. Some kept on their hats, and some, more fortunately placed, kept up their umbrellas. But when Bernadette knelt to kiss the ground there were general cries for the hats to come off and the umbrellas to come down, partly through respect and partly through a desire to see. Those who forgot to remove their hats were assisted by the crowds.

M. Estrade who had been waiting at the top of the hill in the hope that he might follow Bernadette through the crowd had not been able to do so. He contented himself with observing the people around him. His attention was struck by a "hardy and stern-looking mountaineer crying like a child . . . by a stalwart laborer giving vent to his emotions by twisting his stick backwards and forwards until it broke in two, by an artisan who exhausted his vocabulary in relieving the overflow of his wonder, while in a far corner an educated gentleman who had long since ceased to pray was obviously trying to bring back to his lips the forgotten formulas of early days."

While Bernadette was on her hands and knees kiss-

ing the ground it was always as though, in the midst of that crowd, she were alone with her apparition and in the contemplation of it. On this Sunday she left the grotto and went directly to Mass where she joined her classmates being prepared for confirmation.

Meanwhile Commissioner Jacomet and an examining magistrate, M. Rives, had decided to talk with Bernadette again to try to dissuade her from going to the grotto. Apparently the Commissioner did not wish to repeat the experience of himself fetching her for the examination. Accordingly he asked Léon Latapie, the road-mender, to wait before the church with him and to bring her to M. Rives' lodging when she came out.

She came presently, in the little line of girls walking next to a Sister of the Hospice. Léon took her gently by the arm.

"Why do you take her?" asked the Sister, tears springing to her eyes.

"I was ordered to," he answered.

"What for?" Bernadette asked.

"Child, you must come with us," he answered. They went to the house of M. Claverie, the notary, where M. Rives lodged. When they entered, M. Rives, the judge, was seated.

"So it's you, you scamp!"

"Yes, sir. It's me."

"We are going to shut you up! What are you looking for at the grotto? Why lead on a crowd like that? Does anyone put you up to act this way? We are going to put you in prison."

"I'm ready," she answered.

Commissioner Jacomet walked up and down in agitation.

"You must stop going to the grotto."

"I will not stop going, sir."

"I will put you in prison!"

"All right, but they won't keep me in prison for long."

"Your father was there," he reminded her.

"Yes, you put him there, sir; but you had to let him out!" she exclaimed.

"I will let you die in prison," he answered.

Just then the Sister Superior of the Hospice rushed in. "Oh gentlemen [she was crying], I beg of you. You will kill this little child! Let us have her!"

The magistrate, Rives, thought for a moment and turned to Commissioner Jacomet. "What do you want to do about it? There is nothing we can do with her. Why not let her go?"

Bernadette then left with the Sister Superior. "It will be over Thursday, for that is the last day," she told them in parting.

That afternoon Bernadette had another interview, but this time it was pleasant; it was with M. Clarens, the young schoolmaster. He doubtless treated her very gently. "For," he writes, "she is quite dear to someone who is infinitely dear to me." He wanted to dissuade her from going to the grotto, but instead he came away converted to letting her go. "Hardly a month ago she was still a shepherdess. Her naïve innocence, everything in her, bespeaks loudly that she is incapable of the slightest fraud! But then," he added in bewilderment, "then what does she see?"

That day, also, there were visitors at the grotto. A certain Martin Tarbès made a small trench of bark to catch the water, and Domingieux, the carpenter, helped him. Men by the names of Fourcade, Courtade, and Casterot helped them. Together they made a basin some twenty inches wide and about a yard long; they wanted

to make it larger still, but some women were there waiting for water and they did not want to muddy it further.

This was the first piscina.

The Curé Peyramale had forbidden the clergy under his control to go to the grotto — and they had obeyed. But Abbé Dézirat, a young graduate of the seminary who had not yet been assigned a post, was passing through Lourdes. He was a native of Barbazan-Debat, where he was living with his family awaiting orders from his Bishop. On the day of which we speak he had been to see the Abbé Claire, and was on his way home. The Abbé Claire had told young Father Dézirat of the occurrences at Lourdes. The young man was neither a curate nor a vicar and M. Peyramale had no authority over him ; moreover the authorities of the whole diocese had not yet expressed themselves. And since his carriage stopped there ! Nevertheless Father Dézirat took pains not to go in too conspicuous a manner. Someone told him that there was a way of coming out on the grotto from the wood road. His conscience was apparently not very easy ; but he went.

The Thirteenth Apparition, Monday, March 1st

When Father Dézirat arrived, very early, hundreds of people had already congregated. They were of every condition — men, women, children, workers, peasants, bourgeois, and several soldiers. Finally, the crowd numbered around thirteen hundred.

Bernadette arrived; she was neither slow nor hurried. She was calm and showed no sign of exaltation. "Everything indicated a lucid spirit in a healthy body." He saw

her pass through the crowd which by then had become denser still.

Her father and mother were with her. It was their first appearance together at the grotto; they were worried about her. People pressed so close to her that they were actually pushed over on her; and they stepped on her hands as she crawled up on hands and knees kissing the earth.

At the top of the steep path some eight or ten soldiers from Visens were congregated in their white coats and kepis. One of them came forward and asked Mademoiselle Estrade, who was with Bernadette, if this was the child who saw the Blessed Virgin and on her affirmative answer, they fell in line, two and two, before her and marched down the hill. "If they did not keep rank," Mademoiselle Estrade says, "they at least marched with much propriety." And when they reached the grotto they took off their kepis and held them respectfully in their hands.

Just then Abbé Dézirat made an effort to get closer. "Let this priest through," someone called. And although the voice was low it was heard by everyone and in the respectful silence, the words passed along. "Who is it?" The crowd whispered, "An emissary of the Bishop?"

"A spy of the police?"

"A friend?"

"An enemy?"

But the young priest himself was deep in contemplation of the face of Bernadette.

He was not, in a way, a very good witness. The crowd, he recalled, was in an attitude of fervent prayer; it sighed a little, it moaned. But he could not recall if a

man or a woman was with her, nor what she wore, except that it was a hood or a cowl. And he did not remember the color of her dress. His mind was absorbed with Bernadette. He had been inclined to think it all an illusion ; he had wished that it were real ! And also he had a very grave apprehension that perhaps a demon were there transfigured into an angel of light.

He watched her tell her beads, and then by the expression of her face and by her attitude, the crowd knew that the apparition was present. All seemed to experience a thrill, for although only Bernadette saw the Lady, joy, not unmixed with fear, was painted on all their faces. "I thought," he said, "that I was on the threshold of Paradise." But he thought also of Curé Peyramale's prohibition, and with a great effort he tore himself away "from that blessed place."

Bernadette remained kneeling. She had in her hand the rosary of a friend, Pauline Sans, who had asked her to carry it. When she lifted it the Lady made a sign to her to use her own and so she slipped it back into her pocket, and taking out her own held it up to the apparition.

A woman near her exclaimed, "The Blessed Virgin must be blessing her rosary !"

"What does she want us to do ? Does she want to have all of them blessed by the Virgin ?" For ever since the day when she had asked the crowd to kneel and kiss the earth the majority of the crowd imitated her every act. When she prayed they prayed ; when she kissed the earth, they kissed the earth, and those who could not reach the earth picked up handfuls of it and pressed it to their lips.

François Soubirous in great excitement also thought that the Virgin was blessing the rosaries. "Hurry," he called, "rosaries in the air !"

Then Bernadette began her laborious climb to the grotto and spring. People were so pushed by those behind them that they stepped on her. "I'll make them go, those peasants," the old village constable, Jean Vergez, said. But she told him to mind the rosebush instead, and see that no one disturbed that.

Then two of the soldiers from Visens went to her aid. They placed themselves in front of her, walking backwards, and pushed aside those who were in the way. Once the crowd refused to move and for a moment the soldiers were stopped. Bernadette could not go ahead; and thus obstructed she sat back on her heels and cast a bewildered look around her until she was able again to make progress.

Jean Domingieux described her very vividly. "She was as white as a wax candle," he says. "I was struck, seeing her that way, smiling." She was probably very thinly clad also, and it was cold. "I had on a burnoose," he says in describing the day. "First she put down the candle and went toward the fountain, and I saw her move her fingers against the rock where there was some grass. I saw her drinking. She said nothing at all: I heard only a sort of little groaning or breathing of joy."

The Abbé Pène had not, of course, been present at these apparitions, but being curious to know what had happened in regard to the rosaries, he asked Bernadette to come to him. He pretended to be cross with her, to reproach her for having taken advantage of a sacred ceremony.

"This morning they say you blessed rosaries at the grotto!"

"Oh," she answered, "women do not wear the stole!" and then she explained to him what had happened.

The Paris papers reported this incident at the grotto.

It called the crowd "2,500 boobies." "Assuming a grand air of authority, she ordered the fools to present their rosaries and then blessed them all." But this only served to arouse still further the curiosity of the people and to enlarge the crowd.

It was on this day that a cure occurred which attracted no attention at the time, but which was revealed by the episcopal commissioners in November 1858.

Catherine Latapie, a woman of forty, for two years had suffered from a partial paralysis of the right hand. An accident had occurred to her in October of 1856, when, climbing an oak tree to knock down acorns, she had fallen and dislocated her right arm and hand. With treatment her arm had become normal, but the last two fingers of her hand were bent and she could neither straighten them out nor close them into the palm of her hand.

She had come to the grotto on this day, the first of March, and after asking the Blessed Virgin to intercede for her had dipped her fingers into the spring. She immediately felt herself completely cured: she could open and close her fingers, and use them as easily as before the accident. Also they no longer pained her.

It was at this moment, however, that this woman also felt the first pains of the birth of a child that she was carrying and whose term it was. She immediately renewed her prayers to the Blessed Virgin to permit her to return home without difficulty. She walked the six kilometers to her home where a quarter of an hour later her son was born. Catherine Latapie's son was called the "*Child of the Miracle*" and became a priest.

Meanwhile the Abbé Dézirat went to see an old friend, the Abbé Burosse, superior of the seminary, but as he told him of the events at the grotto he could see that Father Burosse was on guard against him. That after-

noon he went to see Abbé Sempé and Abbé Pène. Abbé Sempé was prefect of studies at the seminary and Abbé Pène, professor of physics. They laughed at him and ridiculed him for his credulity.

From Lourdes he went to Bétharram and from there home. Along the way he had occasion to talk with several priests and although with the laughter of Abbé Sempé and Abbé Pène in his ears he had become very reserved, he did speak to several concerning the things he had witnessed at the grotto. "And one and all," he recounts, "received my words with a smile of pity."

The next morning the crowds collected as usual. A long spell of fine weather had made it possible for many people to come.

The Fourteenth Apparition, Tuesday, March 2nd

The apparition was brief, but the Lady said to Bernadette :

"You will go and tell the priests to have a chapel built here, and to have a procession come."

Bernadette was more afraid of the Curé Peyramale than of the *gendarmerie* ; nevertheless she tried to arrange to see him. The Curé was at the house of M. Lavigne, in the Rue de la Gare near the Hôtel du Nord, and Bernadette asked her Aunt Basile to go with her there.

"I don't want to go with you anywhere," her aunt said. "You make us sick having to listen to all those people whispering disagreeable things in our ears at the grotto ! 'She sees nothing ! This whole thing is only done to make money !' And the idea of going to M. le Curé above everything frightens me to death."

Bernadette, filled with anxiety, stopped urging. But she added, "The Lady wants me to go to M. le Curé." Her Aunt Basile, then, seeing her so determined, went with her.

It is necessary at this point to get a better understanding of the local clergy and their point of view.

The Abbé Pomian was, as we have already said, con-

nected with the Hospice, and in his capacity there instructed the young girls in their catechism and in other things necessary for their first Communion. He was also Bernadette's confessor. He believed her to be honest, but he did not believe that she saw the Blessed Virgin. He thought that it was all "a comedy of hallucinations."

The Abbé Pène was a physicist in the local seminary. He was not connected with the parish church as the Abbé Pomian was, but since he lived in the community, the Curé Peyramale, as head of that parish, was his superior. The Abbé Pène neither exactly believed nor disbelieved. But he did think that it was the duty of the clergy to go down to the grotto and observe. He did not believe that there was anything in church doctrine to preclude a true appearance of the Blessed Virgin, and apparently he thought that each case should be judged on its own merits. But whenever he stated this (in the long hours of discussion taking place behind closed doors by the supposedly indifferent clergy), he promptly had the gibe of "credulous" thrown in his face.

"We'll be accused of egging Bernadette on if we appear at the grotto," Curé Peyramale would say. "And if the matter miscarries, a storm of ridicule will descend on us, and the Church will suffer accordingly. Besides," he would add, "if there is any stuff of the divine in it, that divine doesn't need us in order to come out on top!"

The Curé Peyramale was what is called an intellectual. He was a precise man with a sharp mind, a man of refinement and from the upper ranks of society. In appearance he was hardly handsome, but he certainly was commanding. He was heavy set rather than fat, and his level brows and stern eyes were set in a square face. His lips were narrow and stern, also, and his nose was a bit

too much like that of an aristocratic eagle. Hard to convince, he was the sort of man who, once convinced, would stand by forever. He was inclined to be gregarious and got along equally well with the very pious and with those who were less practically religious. He could conciliate, and he could balance. But he was in no sense a quibbler. And he was eminently practical.

His superior, the Bishop, Monseigneur Bertrand Sévère Laurence, was a man of an entirely different personality. He had risen from humble beginnings to high places. In looks he was the opposite of the Curé Peyramale: thin, nervous, with a slightly sarcastic smile, he was seemingly an insecure man whose greatest attention was turned on his own relationship to Heaven. It was very difficult for the Bishop to make a decision — or, rather, it was very difficult to keep to one after it was made. The Curé Peyramale privately called him “the trembler.”

But he did not tremble when it came to any decision about church doctrine. He could also be very energetic about minor infractions of the liturgy:

“It has come to my notice,” he wrote in that same year, “that the last strophe of some of the hymns is still read and sung in certain churches according to the particulars of the ancient rite. This liturgical infraction must cease.”

There also seemed to the Bishop and clergy a tendency in existence in Lourdes and the surrounding country which could not be ignored: that of the people (with even more than the usual independence of mountain people) to take their religion into their own hands. Protestantism once had been forced on them and although they were very devoutly Catholic they had still

something of the Protestant way of deciding their own religious affairs.

They had also a way of deciding what prophets were false, what true. And having a profound faith in seers, they had many times congregated by the thousands in this very district to watch similar occurrences. It was no new thing — but it was proving very troublesome, and especially so to the clergymen who were so soon to have an interview with Bernadette.

In the end she was accompanied to the interview with Curé Peyramale not only by her Aunt Basile but by her godmother and a fair-sized crowd of people who probably expected, as they stood waiting at the gate, to see her thrown out instead of coming out of her own volition.

For the occurrences of the afternoon and evening we have the accounts of several witnesses : Abbé Pène, Basile Casterot, Dominique Cazenave and in some instances, Bernadette herself. The best connected story can thus be made by paraphrasing these witnesses whose testimony was later taken under oath. The Curé was present, of course, and the Abbé Pomian, and at least one other priest, who is unnamed but who was evidently not unfriendly to her.

It was just after luncheon when the interview took place. The Curé Peyramale walked up and down as Bernadette gave him her message.

"The Lady wants a procession to be formed to go to the grotto."

"How do you expect us, you little liar, to conduct a procession for that Lady?" He strode up and down angrily talking to the other priests.

"It is unfortunate to have a family like that one in the parish ! Always stirring up unrest in the town and set-

ting people running!" He turned to her suddenly, "We'll do better than that; we'll give you a torch, and you can go and lead the procession. Oh, they will follow you; you don't need any priests!"

She replied, "I don't ask people to go with me."

The Curé spoke to the aunt. "Hold her there! Don't let her move," although this was unnecessary as she was apparently half frozen with fright.

"Listen [to Bernadette]! You see nothing. A lady can't come out of a hole in the rocks! You don't tell me her name," he added. "There can't be anything in it!"

Bernadette listened to him in silence except when he exaggerated or changed her statements around. Then she would say, "I didn't tell you that, Monsieur le Curé."

It was alarming to see him. He shouted at her. "You will be locked up." He had a very powerful voice. She was like chaff before the wind and she was very afraid of him. She sat hunched up in her little shawl and did not move. "Ask her her name," he shouted.

"I do," Bernadette answered, "but she only smiles."

It was frightening to hear him, just to listen to his voice! He stormed up and down, shouting, "A lady! a procession!"

The strange priest glanced at the Curé, then he leaned toward Bernadette, saying under his breath, "Take care, little one, one must be very sure of such statements."

Then, in her anxiety, she became harassed and confused. She wasn't, on questioning, quite sure which day the Lady wanted it, but she surmised, as the others did, that it should be on or before March 4th which she thought would be the last day.

The Curé interrupted her.

"Wretch," he cried, "are you quite sure that the apparition told you to ask us for a procession at all? For

if she really did ask for it we can't get out of holding it ; but if she didn't, and we do have one we shall become a laughing stock ! And," he added as an afterthought, "do great harm to the Church."

And Bernadette, terrified by this priest whose glance and voice and gestures were so menacing, answered :

"Qu'a crédi — (I believe so)."

"There !" he exclaimed, "you are not even certain of it." And he immediately felt authorized to feel that all of it was pure imposture.

And with her Aunt Basile weeping, they left.

Bernadette had hardly left when Abbé Pène entered. He found the Curé and the Abbé Pomian in the sitting-room. He knew, of course, that there had been another apparition and he knew also of the deputation to the presbytery, but he merely asked what was new.

"Something new, all right !" the Curé exclaimed, and from his tone Abbé Pène was sure that it would be unpleasant news. Then Curé Peyramale told about the interview and how the child had become confused as to what the apparition had said. Finally he asked with an expression both sharp and sly, "Well, do you still believe in it ?"

"And why not ?" Abbé Pène replied.

"Oh that's really a bit too strong," the Curé exclaimed with a brusque movement of his head and hand. "It's pure stubbornness to want to go on believing it."

They discussed and considered, and finally Abbé Pène ended the conversation by saying, "Patience ! When the drama is ended, then the time will be at hand for us to judge !"

Meanwhile Bernadette had hardly got away when she realized that although she had asked for a procession, she had forgotten to ask for a chapel !

None of her family would return with her. But Dominique Cazenave seems either to have been more foolhardy or made of sterner stuff. She not only volunteered to go, but went back at once alone to ask the Curé when she could bring Bernadette back.

"Well then, bring her this evening at seven o'clock."

"But please, Monsieur le Curé, don't frighten her so!"

"Oh, no — no, I won't," he promised.

At seven then they returned. Bernadette was in hope that the assistant, Father Serres, would be there. And he was. So also were the Abbé Pène and the Abbé Pomian.

The Curé asked them to sit down and immediately Bernadette said, without any introductory remarks, "Monsieur le Curé, the Lady dressed in white, whom I see in the grotto, asked me to tell the priests to have a chapel built at the grotto!"

"A chapel?" said the Curé. "Is this going to be the same as the procession? Are you sure of it?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé, I am certain of it."

"Well, you had better tell your lady for me," he said, his temper rising, "to make that rosebush bloom as a sign!"

From the first people had expected a miracle, and the rumor had gone around that the briar would bloom on the last day, at least.

"Do you know what she calls herself?" he asked her again.

"No, Monsieur le Curé."

"You ought to ask her then."

"I do ask her," she answered in some bewilderment, "but she does nothing but smile."

"She is making fun of you : ask her what her name is,

and when we know her name, we will build a chapel for her. Not just a little one but a good-sized one."

Then he changed his tactics.

"Have you ever heard people talk about fairies?"

"No, Monsieur le Curé."

"Well, have you ever heard people talk about sorcerers?"

She was puzzled. Sorcerers were called *brouches* in Lourdes and the priest had forgotten for the moment that Bernadette spoke only dialect. Dominiquette reminded him of that; then she asked the Curé to excuse them and they left.

"You must ask the Lady her name," said Dominiquette to her on the way home, "because without that knowledge no chapel will be built!"

So the clergy, with the Bishop at its head laughed at the apparition, and the Prefect and the Under-prefect and the Imperial Commissioner and the Police Commissioner and the police did not feel obligated to take them seriously either.

The Under-prefect wrote that day to the Prefect that they had hoped the storm would soon blow over and that public common-sense would pass sharp judgment on such idle tales. Still, on the contrary, the crowd grew larger, and if the fair weather held to Thursday, which was a market day also, the day of the last "visit," it would be necessary to take steps. The slightest disorderly movement in the crowd which would accumulate on the plateau, on the paths, and along the banks of the Gave, would undoubtedly cause accidents of a most serious nature. So together the civil authorities gave instructions that a small detachment of infantry which was charged with guarding the fort, the *gendarmerie*, and all

the municipal police officers should assemble in the interest of preserving order "demanded by the focusing of these many paths, etc. at a place where so many people will assemble."

Curé Peyramale took his little precautions also. He sent for Bernadette's Aunt Lucile and Aunt Bernarde to tell them to keep her at home. He even threatened to put them all in prison.

"That carnival of an apparition !" he exclaimed. And to Bernadette he said, "I'll have you arrested by the *gendarmes* ! I'll chase you out of here with a broom !"

People were pouring in from the Valley of Argelès, from Bagnères, from Pontacq, and from all the valleys of the River Gave as far as Pau. Great happenings were expected on Thursday, which Bernadette, as well as the rest of the people supposed would be the last day of the apparitions. Nevertheless already on Wednesday, the 3rd, the space was so jammed that the people were almost on top of one another ; and the far bank of the river, a meadow edged with poplars, was also filled. Jacomet calculated that there were surely four thousand people present.

Bernadette appeared accompanied by her mother. As she came everyone bowed and a respectful silence fell around her. She knelt, her rosary in her hand, and waited ; but she waited in vain. The Lady did not appear. Finally, with tears in her eyes, she gave up. "She didn't appear to me because there were too many people — I don't want to come back any more !" she said in distress.

They withdrew as far as the mill and Bernadette's grief was unrestrained. The people around Bernadette tried to comfort her, but André Sajoux, the cousin who owned the house in which they lived, made a practical suggestion. "There are too many people around. Come home and have a little breakfast and then if you want to go back we can take the lower road and the crowd won't follow along."

They went home and at least a part of the crowd dispersed. Bernadette once home crouched down against a bed, her face in her hands. "What did I do to her ?

Perhaps she is angry with me!" While her mother added to everyone's wretchedness by moaning, "Now they will certainly throw us in prison!"

But Bernadette's desire to go back became very strong, and having wrung a grudging consent from her father, she returned with André by the lower road. It had been seven o'clock when they had first gone; it was now nine. There were quite a few people still at the grotto, but those who had slept there the night before in order to be sure of places were gone.

*The Fifteenth Apparition, Wednesday, March 3rd —
The One Usually Rejected*

As Bernadette approached the grotto she saw the Lady waiting for her. It was the only time that this ever occurred. The apparition was of brief duration, however, but presently Bernadette left, happy again.*

In the late afternoon Bernadette courageously returned to the Curé.

"What do you come to tell me today?"

"The Lady smiled when I told her that you wanted her to make the rosebush bloom. She smiled once more and said that she wanted a chapel."

The Curé again lost his temper.

"Do you have any money — you — to have it erected?"

* It is usually stated that the apparition did not appear to Bernadette on this morning of Wednesday, March 3rd. Estrade so states and the Sisters of Nevers also, but there is no reason to doubt the mass of evidence in Père Cros' *Histoire* (vol. I, p. 360). It will be observed that this brings the total number of apparitions to nineteen, instead of eighteen as is commonly stated. Père Cros says that there were eighteen but he does not include the last brief glimpse on July 16. The Bishops' Commission says there were eighteen, but does not include this one of March the 3rd.

"No, Monsieur le Curé !"

"Neither do I ! So go and tell your Lady to give you some !"

She went home where the rooms were jammed with neighbors and relations who had come for the last great day. Jeanne-Marie Védère, the cousin who later became a nun, was amongst them. When Bernadette returned most of them withdrew and the family ate their slight supper and went to bed.

Meanwhile the authorities had not been idle ; on the contrary, they made the most astonishing preparations. M. Bourriots, the police lieutenant from Argelès, sent a long dispatch to the Mayor :

"Since there will be a tremendous number of people tomorrow, you must establish a 'one-way' system along the road which leads to the grotto. Those going will pass by on the left side of the road, and those returning, on the right. This arrangement should be put into effect at the most logical point, that is, the narrowest, the nearest to the town, and maintained every few paces by infantrymen. For this purpose, ask for fifteen men.

"You will take close note of everything that goes on during the day and at what hours. For this purpose, always have your notebooks ready in your hands.

"The men will have an hour for lunch, but they will only go to eat one after the other, not all at once. . .

"Advise your men to be as calm as possible, and keep those close to you who do not seem particularly to display this characteristic.

"Do not be too much in evidence where these miracles are going on. Let the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, and the Imperial Procurator wield the authority ; this is their affair ; ours is only to keep the people in circulation

and to maintain order. The rest does not concern us. Recommend all this to your men.

"It is imperative that everyone have his musket along with him as well as a pistol in his pocket. These weapons are to be loaded.

"Discipline will be regular, as if under arms in the field, and not as on town service. Have the men put down the chin straps on their caps, and hold an inspection of your men before leaving. They should have gloves with them at all times. Be careful!"

The Mayor in his turn had written to the Commandant of the Fort: "I am obliged to ask you to put your troops at my disposition. Please be so good as to have all your available soldiers at the city hall tomorrow morning at six o'clock."

And the Lieutenant had sent another dispatch: "I foresee that there will be in Lourdes between eighteen and twenty thousand persons, perhaps even twenty-five thousand!"

"You must take care to have a horse ready saddled as well as a free man, so that, at the first signal, he can leave posthaste for Tarbes for reinforcements."

It is a bit difficult looking back on it over a period of eighty years to know what they intended to do with the loaded guns and the light infantry, or even with the chin straps and white gloves. However, they were seen the next day using the notebooks.

It was a fine, calm night; the starlit sky was brilliant. Walking along the roads the groups told the Litany of the Blessed Virgin or sang the *Magnificat*. In the streets there was a tumult: a crowd of strangers coming in from all directions, either hunting places at the grotto or trying to find lodgings for the night.

The Curé's demand that the apparition make the rose-

bush bloom was known everywhere. Everybody was stirred by it ; everybody wished to be there when it happened. There was passionate controversy on every side. "She won't see it any more ; there's just been foolishness at the grotto !" But others disagreed, and the very strangest rumors were afloat that not only would the Lady make the rosebush bloom, but that she would show herself on that day to all present.

M. Bourriots, the police lieutenant from Argelès, like a good general, had not waited for the day of battle to familiarize himself with the field of action. That night he had gone to the grotto to study the contour of the ground for the massing of visitors, and then very late on his way to his quarters he had gone by the house in which Bernadette lived in order to look over the approach to it.

The street of the Petits-Fossés was narrow and cobbled, with sloping gutters. There he saw the first line of battle against which he was making such elaborate preparation — for kneeling on the hard cobblestones in the middle of the dark street opposite the Soubirous house, was a handful of people praying, with rosaries running through their fingers.

The police lieutenant paused ; he looked at them and pondered. He was a bit taken aback. "Well," he said to himself, "if there are many like that, my *gendarmes* will be exhausted from service in this town ! But certainly they have faith," he added, "which everyone doesn't possess !"

At five in the morning three men came to the Soubirous' house accompanied by a lady from Lourdes. "These are three doctors from Bordeaux," she said. They had been sent by the authorities to examine Bernadette who it has always been stated they wished to have

locked up. A brief examination of Bernadette did not prove her mentally ill, however, and she finally asked to be excused in order to go to Mass at the church. The doctors were to return in the evening.

It was nearly 6:30 when Bernadette reached the church; and after Mass she slipped away unobtrusively and hurried across the square toward her home.

When she started to the grotto, accompanied by her little party of relatives, she found the *gendarmes* drawn up all along the route. The people with her went down like a procession on a festival day; there was no disorder.

At one point along the way Bernadette was stopped by a woman carrying in her arms a child three or four years old who had never talked or walked. The mother asked Bernadette to take a candle which she had and to burn it and pray for her child. Bernadette was thoughtful. "I will pray for the child," she answered, "but as for the candle, you can burn it yourself either in the grotto or in the church in honor of the Blessed Virgin."

Bernadette was extremely reserved and quiet on this walk. She had been a little delayed by the crowds and by this interruption. It was her custom to reach the grotto at seven. The tightly packed mass of people was beginning also to grow impatient, but most of them were expecting a miracle, and there was an attitude of great reverence. Although they were shoving and milling a bit, they were perfectly quiet. A witness, M. Clements, said they were like a vast ant-heap; Martin Tarbès, the carpenter, said they were like horses given their heads.

*The Sixteenth Apparition, Thursday, March 4th—
The Last of the Cycle*

The path down to the grotto had been widened and straightened, and four of the men had made a sort of

barrier of stakes and cross-pieces to give Bernadette access to the grotto and to keep the crowd back a bit.

Suddenly the noise of voices on the top of the cliff was audible and all eyes in the crowd waiting below turned in the same direction ; all the men took off their caps. The crowd exclaimed, "It is the Saint ! She is coming." The cooperation of all the *gendarmes* was necessary in order to open a path for her. Her father headed her little group, and two of her aunts were with her as she walked down.

Then once inside the barrier, Bernadette knelt, and as she knelt the crowd knelt. A witness, Jeanne-Marie Adrian, told of it : "And I shall never forget the fear which swept over me and the beating of my heart at the sight of that young girl. I felt myself transported all of a sudden to the day of the last judgement ! 'Oh Lord,' I said to myself, 'will it be thus, when the time comes to appear before Thee, to give account for graces received ?' "

At the base of the fort, M. Dutour was standing watching the throng. Back in the town solitude reigned, and the Square, usually so animated on market days, was deserted. To the Abbé Pène on his way from Mass, it was like a hive from which the swarm has flown. It was like a town from which the inhabitants had fled as the result of some panic.

Only the priests remained in the town ; by specific orders they had kept away from the grotto. But the Abbé Pène was not content to be entirely apart from things. He surrendered to an irresistible curiosity and climbed to the top of a chestnut tree on the elevated side of the Pau road. The sky was clear and the sun, he says, was just commencing to gild the mountains and the valleys.

The confused murmur of the multitude reached him from the distance. It seemed to the Abbé that Christian wisdom presupposed conduct other than that imposed on the priests that day. He felt that they, more than anyone else, might have had the "quality, light and grace to judge whether the facts of the grotto stemmed from God and ought to be received with respect, or if they were to be cast aside as acts of satanic fraudulence. I was not completely a believer in the apparitions, yet I did wish fervently that we might be permitted to study those scenes in which were implicit, doubtless, most serious manifestations of the divine will !"

Down at the grotto, inside the little enclosure, it was very muddy and very stony. Commissioner Jacomet was there, Bernadette's father and two aunts, her cousin, Jeanne-Marie Védère, and possibly others. Madame Jacomet, the wife of the Commissioner, was also evidently close by, for she heard, or thought she heard, François say to Bernadette, "Don't make a mistake today, act well" (*Nou troumpes pas, one : he de pla !*) ; and she said to herself, "This girl is playing a part at the instigation of someone." But then that had always been the theory of her husband. It seems most likely that Madame Jacomet heard some admonition to "behave yourself nicely," such as any father might make, for François himself was certainly a very staunch believer in his daughter's supernatural powers.

Bernadette was certainly well watched. Evidently using Jacomet's notebook, the mayor later reports, "She smiled for ten minutes, then was serious again for three minutes. She nodded three times," etc. Jeanne-Marie Adrian says, "I counted her smiles : she smiled eighteen times."

In her usual place with her rosary and lighted candle

Bernadette waited, saying her beads longer than usual. Then they saw the change come over her face and everyone exclaimed, "Now she sees!" And everyone knelt and prayed with great fervor.

Bernadette's little cousin Jeanne-Marie saw the change too. She looked eagerly for the supernatural being, but she looked in vain; she could see nothing.

Bernadette went up into the grotto where she nodded and talked while the crowd waited for the Blessed Virgin to appear to all, or at least for the eglantine to burst into bloom. After a while she came back to the place where she had knelt, made the sign of the cross, gazed a moment at the niche in the rock and putting out her candle asked to leave.

One of the aunts who was near the cave burst into tears and wept without restraint.

From his tree on the distant road-side Abbé Pène saw the crowd break up and set out along the way to the town.

Everyone cried out that they had been deceived. They had hoped to see a great miracle and they had only seen a little girl pray and smile as she gazed at a niche in a rock.

But those who still hoped wanted to kiss her hand. And the rumor ran through the crowd that François was making everyone pay fifteen centimes to touch her. And the rumor went around also that this great crowd was going to her house. The police fortunately heard this rumor. "For," says D'Angla, "when ignorant minds are under the power of religious enthusiasm the love of relics is a lot stronger than the respect for property. If we did not maintain good order that poor little house would doubtless end up in the pockets of the various pilgrims."

So the police sent men on ahead to protect the house.

As Bernadette and her group came up from the grotto they passed in the crowd close to Eugénie Troy, a little girl from Luz whose eyesight was very poor. She appeared to be blind and seeing that she excited Bernadette's pity, the father of the girl asked Bernadette to pray for her and Bernadette in a sort of excess of pity embraced the child. Immediately a murmur went through the crowd that a miracle had been performed and that the girl could see. Bernadette's father was accused later of having staged this. It is possible, Father Cros thinks, that there was some pre-arrangement. But surely he is right in assuming that it was arranged out of pity and a profound belief in his daughter's powers — a belief which Bernadette herself never did share with him her father.

News of this "miracle" spread rapidly through the compact crowd along the road from the grotto to the town and made the people all the more determined to go to Bernadette's house and to have her blessing.

Meanwhile people who had been witnesses to the scene between Bernadette and the partially blind Eugénie Troy, rushed to tell the Imperial Procurator about it. They believed a miracle had taken place and apparently expected him to rejoice with him. He sent them back to bring the girl and her father in.

"You were blind, and now you see?"

"I wasn't completely blind, Monsieur, but certainly I see much better now!"

"Certainly, Monsieur," added her father, "she sees much better, she hardly saw at all, to tell the truth; it is quite different now."

The Procurator dismissed them and they went im-

mediately to the presbytery to show the child to Curé Peyramale. The Curé questioned her, and he questioned her father and all who were with her. And suddenly Curé Peyramale who had refused to let his priests go to the grotto and observe, who had refused to go outside his presbytery for fear he would be involved in an argument, who had apparently urged his superior, the Bishop, to refuse to let the priests take any part, and who had finally threatened to sweep Bernadette out with a broom, departed from all sober thinking and reserve and declared that the girl had been blind and now did see. Dominiquette Cazenave had said after that stormy session with the Curé, that she thought he did believe, and she was apparently right. What the Curé Peyramale had been fighting those spring evenings as he walked with folded hands behind those doors had probably been an urge to go down to the grotto and surrender.

His rôle for a short while after this episode is that of miracle hunter. And it was some time before he would accept the ordinary evidence of his ears and eyes that this blind girl had in no way been improved. Although he followed up and investigated each rumor of a miracle he still seems to have been profoundly conflicted in his feelings. However he made no public pronouncement of his faith in the apparitions.

Meanwhile the crowds soon filled the Petits-Fossés, but room was made for Bernadette to pass through. The number who wanted to enter the house was so great that André Sajoux had her go to the second floor and made the people file slowly in and out. They touched her or kissed her hand while she remonstrated, "Why do you touch me. I have no power!" They wanted her to touch their rosaries, but she would not. Finally, har-

assed and completely worn out, she consented to touch their rosaries to her own. "But I'm not a priest!" she said.

The crowd outside was restive and she was compelled to show herself at the window several times in order to quiet them.

The women all wanted to embrace her, and certainly the attitude of some was close to idolatry. Jeanne-Marie Adrian, who had compared the scene to the judgement day, and who counted the eighteen smiles, had followed her home. "And I had the pleasure of embracing her with all the joy of my heart. Oh Lord, what pleasure shall we taste," she exclaimed, "when we shall have the great good fortune to contemplate Jesus and Mary, face to face, in the day of glory, since I felt almost as great a joy in embracing Bernadette."

On their way out the *gendarmes* took the opportunity to ask if any had left money or gifts in the house. But no one had.

After the crowd had dispersed Bernadette went to Curé Peyramale to report. She told him again that the Lady had only answered her question about her identity with a smile.

"Nevertheless, you must ask her again who she is. If she is the Blessed Virgin, I shall do all she asks with pleasure. Didn't she tell you to come back?"

"No sir, she didn't tell me to."

Bernadette went home again, but not yet to rest, for the three doctors returned and examined her once more. They pronounced her sound in mind and body, although she was so badly nourished. Presumably that was a day on which her tuberculosis and her labored breathing were not so pronounced. They did warn François to move, for the lodging they found too damp and lacking in air.

"You will all contract some sort of illness here," they said.

Around the town all sorts of exaggerated rumors were floating. Cheated of its rosebush the public fantasy had apparently centered on the blind girl from Luz. They told each other how the Blessed Virgin herself had told Bernadette of the girl's presence in the crowd and that the Lady had commanded the girl to wash herself in the spring. And that now the girl could see.

If Bernadette had not seen the Blessed Virgin, what had she seen, they asked. And Père Cros comments, "Our ancestors would not have failed to exclaim that the fairy Melusine of Brittany, or the Banshee of Ireland, or Ortoli of Corsica, or Margane, or Urgele, or the White Lady, had left her stamping ground, to come and take up her dwelling in some privileged cavern at the very root of our hills."

But these peasants did not say such things; they believed in spite of the failure of the rosebush to bloom that the apparition was the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God.

A spell of bad weather now set in. The people, perhaps a bit spent with so much tension, relaxed, and stayed away from the grotto ; that is, all but a few women and children. Bernadette herself no longer went to the grotto. She saw in the apparition of March the 4th the end of her tryst.

Public opinion about her was now much divided. By some she was called "the Saint," and her hand was kissed ; but by others she was thought less of because of her contact with the blind girl and the cry of miracle. The "miracle" itself was shortly discredited : the blind girl's own pastor, on his way through Lourdes explained her true condition to the Curé Peyramale and he, in turn, called in the father of the girl for further facts.

The newspapers began to see a good news story in the events at Lourdes. They repeated legendary tales told by the people of Bartès about Bernadette's ability to pass through water dry shod, and about the dove seen lighting on her head. And they began to deny rumors of miracles, which further aroused interest.

The "miracles" were very simple at that stage : An unbeliever laughs at a man who is praying at the grotto and is punished by a mishap ; a beggar claims to have seen the Virgin and is accompanied by a proud escort crying, "Make way for the poor man who has seen the Blessed Virgin."

The Paris papers took it up and laughed "at the good villagers of the Pyrenees."

The work of the clergy became overwhelming. "Ev-

ery day I am obliged to answer letters which are addressed to me from Paris, from Rouen, from Toulouse, from all regions," wrote Curé Peyramale. The excitement added an extraordinary amount of work in the confessional too, for the religious life of the whole region was greatly stirred.

The officials of the community still strongly suspected the Soubirous family of a desire to make money out of the fame of Bernadette. And perhaps it was not unreasonable to suspect them of ulterior motives. It would have been so easy for them to have improved their economic situation ! Anyone would have set them up in an inn where Bernadette's mere presence would have assured success. A small shop with Bernadette behind the counter would have been a gold mine for the proprietor.

But it is a fact attested to by many unimpeachable sources and finally by the police themselves that although the Soubirous were in extreme want, they unfailingly refused all offers of help.

Many people believe that one of the "three secrets," which Bernadette said the Virgin told her, had to do in some way with her not deriving any material advantage from the apparitions. If so, her resolve was certainly steadfastly held to. Peasants, hearing of the family's poverty, brought baskets of farm produce ; they were declined. Someone, seeing their destitution, asked the baker to give them a loaf of bread daily, without saying who sent it ; the Soubirous refused it. A wealthy woman asked to adopt Bernadette, offering to take the entire family along and to pay 10,000 francs ; they declined this also. Purses of gold, jeweled rosaries, even the sou pieces offered her brothers for guiding visitors to the grotto, were all refused.

Whatever may have been the behavior of the family

before the apparitions, it was certainly impeccable during and after them. There is also no further record of her mother drinking. Moreover, the family's economic situation was made even worse by the publicity. A constant stream of people came to the house, and this interfered with whatever work they may have had to do.

The people credited Bernadette with a power of healing by touch, a power that she always disclaimed. But despite this all the inanimate objects that she touched became imbued with this power in the minds of the people, and André Sajoux had to guard his property. He even heard people asking for pieces of the marble flagging. And he discreetly covered up the mantelpiece with boards — which were hacked away by the knives of visitors.*

However much the officials of the town doubted the good faith of her family they apparently did not doubt that of Bernadette; they considered her hallucinated. But since she did not return to the grotto they believed that the episode was closed. This illusion lasted for a few days only, for Easter was approaching, and March the 25th would be the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.

The Prefect, Baron Massy, learned that candles had been placed in the grotto on Sunday, March the 14th — on Sunday two candles, on Monday three, on Tuesday five. Wednesday a crucifix was put up and decorated with boxwood and laurel. Some engravings were hung and finally ten candles were kept burning day and night. Then the number of candles again diminished, but only because it was hard to make the candles stand up and

* It is still necessary today in all the houses in which Bernadette lived to keep a heavy screen around any object with which she had anything to do. Anything that can be pried loose or chipped off is in danger.

some people in the town were making a board to hold them for Easter.

There were again reports of cures. A deaf woman claimed to hear; and a blind girl claimed to see. The statement of this girl is interesting for it contains the pattern of so many statements made at Lourdes: "I felt first a sharper pain . . . then my sight returned to me. I was perfectly able to distinguish everything before me." * These two claims added greatly to the excitement of the devout.

The correspondence between the authorities continued. They decided to stop the use of the grotto now since it "might degenerate into a scandal and compromise the public peace, as well as the dignity of religion."

But M. Dutour, the Imperial Procurator, who was on the ground, said that in order to have prevented Bernadette from going to the grotto it would have been necessary to use violence. He was of the opinion that the affair would already have blown over except for some misguided people who were writing letters to the paper (he appears to suspect Dr. Dozous) and some others who hoped to profit by the presence of large crowds in Lourdes. Politics had also entered into the picture and the local political groups had become either "pro-grotto" or "anti-grotto."

Meanwhile the devout were taking both flowers and small bits of money to the grotto. Between Sunday the 21st and Wednesday the 24th, thirty-one francs and ninety sous were collected. A basket for money was placed at the grotto, and although Martin Tarbès and his friends made a wooden grill to protect it, this money came nearer to causing a dissension than anything else,

* Neither of these two cures was accepted by the Bishops' Commission which decided that the evidence of permanent cure was lacking.

for no one was quite sure where it went. It was even insinuated that it went into the pockets of the people who guarded it. But it turned out that it had been distributed to the Curé and the vicars for Masses and that what remained was finally turned over to the mayor. The fate of the money preoccupied everyone, so it was decided to give it all in the future to the mayor to be placed in the treasury of the charity office.

People went, knelt, prayed and drank at the spring. There was no disorder, just progressively increasing crowds. With a few sous the visitors bought a glass lamp and some oil, and they bought a small metal holder to put a statue in, around which they hung sacred pictures. Fanny Nicolau, who had been sure that no good could come out of the Massabielle, contributed a picture of the *Virgin with a Bird* and an image of the Sacred Heart.

On Tuesday, in the presence of about five hundred devout people, the statue of the Blessed Virgin was placed in the grotto. This first statue had been made by Félix Maransin, a native of Lourdes, and was the property of the Bourdeu family. Pauline Bourdeu said that it had been used as a street shrine on the feast of Corpus Christi : it was a statue of the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*.

The apprehension of the police was increasing because many people were at the grotto so late at night. At about ten o'clock on Wednesday night, Jacomet's observers estimated three hundred people there and counted seventeen candles. Had they known that women from all over the district were coming to Lourdes the next day they would have been still more worried.

It was the custom of the peasants to go to the sanctu-

aries of Garaison and Bétharram on the Feast of the Annunciation, and the abandonment of these sanctuaries in favor of Lourdes was not anticipated.

Then during the night of March 24th, the eve of the Annunciation, Bernadette awoke with a feeling that she must return to the grotto. She wakened her parents and told them. They argued with her and tried to get her to be practical: she had a cold, it was bad for her to go. But finally at her insistence, they gave their consent. She was to return to the grotto the next day.

The Seventeenth Apparition, Thursday, March 25th

Despite the many visitors the night before, the grotto was nearly deserted at daybreak when Bernadette chose to go, since she usually went at seven but on this morning went at five. The people of the town were just opening their windows when, seeing her leaving her house, the news was spread, and a good many rushed down after her.

Her mother and father were with her and at least one aunt, Lucile. She took her usual place for prayers, with perhaps twenty people pressed close around her.

Candles were burning on the little improvised grotto altar and to Bernadette's eyes the Lady seemed to come down into the cavern and to glance at the altar with much pleasure. She looked at the pictures and candles and flowers, and especially at the little Virgin of the Immaculate Conception in the niche. Bernadette following her there said, "Mademoiselle, will you have the goodness to tell me who you are? (*Madamiséla, boulét aoué la bountá dé mé disé qui es?*)" The apparition smiled but did not answer.

Again Bernadette asked her, and again she only smiled.

"Would you tell me who you are," Bernadette urged. Then the Lady, whose arms were stretched toward the earth in the position of the image on the Miraculous Medal, raised her hands and folded them at the level of her breast. She raised her eyes heavenward.

"I am the Immaculate Conception," she said in patois (*Qué soy l'Immaculado Councepciou*). And then, still smiling, she disappeared.

Bernadette turned to her Aunt Lucile. "Will you give me your candle and let me leave it at the grotto?"

The apparition was over when Ursule Nicolau overtook Bernadette as she was starting to leave. She embraced her and Bernadette whose face was radiant with joy said: "Do you want to know something? Don't tell anyone, but she told me 'I am the Immaculate Conception.'"

Ursule, realizing the importance of the words rushed home. There she told Germaine Raval who was ironing the clothes, and Germaine rushed away to tell others. The news spread rapidly through the town. People shook hands in congratulation on meeting in the street. They rushed to the grotto. By eleven o'clock fifty-two candles were burning, by noon sixty-five. And the crowd was augmented by the country women who had come to Lourdes to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation. They said the rosary over and over and sang the litany; and when they had finished they began all over again. Then they went back to their homes in the country carrying the news of the name of the Lady of the apparitions.

Bernadette, on returning from the grotto, stopped with her Aunt Basile at the house of the Abbé Pomian, who sent her at once to the Curé Peyramale.

But the Curé did not receive her very well. Perhaps

he was still suffering from the smarts of his lost illusion about the miracle of the blind girl.

"Well," he said, "what are you going to tell me to-day?"

"I asked her who she was and she told me, 'I am the Immaculate Conception.'"

"You are mistaken!" the Curé answered curtly. Then he added, "What does that mean, 'the Immaculate Conception'?"

"I don't know," she answered him, "and that's the reason that all the way here I haven't stopped saying the words over and over lest I forget them."

But the Curé only made fun of her. "Your Lady cannot bear that name!" he said.

It was, in fact, a long time before the priests both in Lourdes and elsewhere could reconcile themselves to that name. "May I ask you how or in what sense," wrote one somewhat later, "the joyful Virgin Mary can have said 'I am the Immaculate Conception'? One is tempted to think that this expression is not theologically correct."

That afternoon Bernadette was called in to see the Estrades who asked her to tell them what the apparition had said. She turned then to Mademoiselle Estrade and asked, "But, Mademoiselle, what do these words 'I am the Immaculate Conception' mean?"

It would certainly be unreasonable to suppose that Bernadette did not know that this was one of the titles given to the Virgin. The tiny plaster image at the grotto was so called. And the invocation to the Lady "conceived without sin" was usual in the liturgy. It is, however, quite reasonable to believe that the theological reasoning behind the title was a mystery to her. At fourteen she might easily have heard it discussed without perceiving its implications.

It would be equally beside the point to conclude that M. Jacomet was right in his conclusion that she was therefore only playing a part assigned to her. Nevertheless for some reason, the authorities now felt themselves justified in deciding to act.

M. Lacadé, the mayor, was a pious man who administered his office with one eye on the Church. He was quite evidently in close touch with the Bishop and with the Curé. His viewpoint may be taken to represent that of the latter, and since the Curé had not expressed his change of opinion M. Lacadé was not convinced of the authenticity of the apparitions — although he seems to have been convinced of Bernadette's honesty — but he did see a future in the now well-advertised spring as a thermal bath. As a public official he rejoiced to see Lourdes so full of strangers and business. He could see, at least, no excuse for closing the grotto unless indeed the Church said to. Père Cros says, "M. Lacadé (the mayor) doubted, denied, or affirmed, according as to whether the Curé doubted, denied, or affirmed."

The Prefect, Baron Massy, was of a different type and opinion. He believed that the public was credulous, and Bernadette hallucinated. And he thought that only harm could come to the Church through letting matters go further.

Apparently there had already been some fairly definite conversation between the Mayor and the Prefect in which they had decided that, should Bernadette go again to the grotto they would have her examined again by physicians and, if she were found to be mentally ill, they would have her put into an asylum. However the Mayor wrote the Prefect that he felt it unwise to put her in that sort of hospital because it might cause disorder among the people.

Baron Massy ordered the examination nevertheless, and then he wrote to the Minister of Worship and Education describing and explaining his order. Unless the doctors ordered Bernadette to be confined the only way out would be through the influence of the clergy. But of the clergy, he says, "Although they themselves pretend no faith in these miracles, they did not show themselves prepared to declare themselves in any public and formal way."

On Saturday, the 27th, Dr. Balencie, Dr. Lacrampe, and Dr. Peyrus, went to the Hospice to talk to Bernadette. Dr. Dozous was not amongst this delegation.

The physicians of that period were themselves quite handicapped. They seemed to have labored in a tangle of terminology. In spite of this their description, if not their interpretation, of the first apparition, and of Bernadette is very good. Their report states that she is of a delicate constitution, of a "lymphatic and nervous temperament," but that she has never had nervous attacks. That "she drinks, eats and sleeps marvelously." "She may have been the victim of an hallucination . . . her imagination, under the influence of a moral predisposition, gave it a form which is known to children : that of the statue of the Blessed Virgin which one sees on altars." And they end by saying, "It is probable that when Bernadette is no more sought out by the crowd, when they stop asking her for prayers, and when she has again taken up her ordinary habits, she will cease to dream of the grotto and of the marvelous things which she recounts."

Some years later Dr. Balencie, who in his capacity of doctor of the Hospice came to know her well said, "(She is) equally simple, honest, and sincere. . . We were more struck and disconcerted in considering not just one of her visions, but their continuity."

It is difficult to discuss the diagnosis of Bernadette's condition. The best known men of her time — Charcot, Toisim, Voisin, Diday — all thought her hysterical and hallucinated. But most of them argued from what they read in the papers and formed opinions from false "facts," for reports of her condition were already distorted in such a way as to make her conform in the popular mind with what it was considered should be the background of a girl who had seen the Virgin. Great credence was given to tales of her isolation in Bartres, and of her loneliness as she cared for the sheep. The truth is that coming each morning from an overcrowded house and returning there each night must have made the days with the animals a pleasant interval. Besides, her little playmate often joined her there, as she testified, and the situation of the sheepfold and pastures show them crossed with paths and in sight of the roads.

The tales of her simplemindedness are understandable but false. Rapidly she was being pressed into the mold of the guileless fool, a simple shepherdess, even a feeble-minded little virgin. Her feebleness of mentality was entirely imaginary; indeed her intellectual and moral vigor were astonishing. From this period of her life on, she was to have no privacy and to be placed under extreme pressure; and yet her head was never turned. Her nerves were often perceptibly frayed; but she apparently developed neither ideas of grandeur, nor delusions of persecution. And, almost single-handed, she managed her life with great skill and intelligence. These are not the ways of either the feeble-minded or the insane or the neurotic.

Unfortunately no one really tried to decide about the true state of mind of Bernadette, except perhaps these three men in this first simple report. Later, believers

spent their energy proving that she had really seen the Virgin ; while the mental specialists of the period spent theirs proving that she was mentally ill and therefore had not seen the Virgin. Pressed, the latter fell into prophecy — that she would become insane later.

Neither side was doing itself justice, for it was not necessary to prove her perfectly well adjusted in order to prove her visions true. Nor was it necessary to prove her insane in order to prove her visions false. Many children go through periods of atypical behavior at pubescence and, while the child in the present day is not likely to have a vision of the Virgin, to the children and adults of that period and place it was not at all unusual. Many people argue today that what God has done in the past He can still do today and they believe that the Blessed Virgin Mary did appear at Lourdes. To another type of mind this seems beyond acceptance.

It is not the function of the biographer of a person and movement to attempt to settle such controversy. But it is permissible to state that this girl not only appears to have been sane but also not in the commonly accepted sense of the word neurotic, unless these episodes of the apparitions themselves so prove her.

So at least she appears on close study and so she appeared then to the three doctors (and to Dr. Dozous, whose opinion counted less), and so to the clergy who were as anxious as anyone else to avoid scandal, and so to the authorities, with the exception of Jacomet and Baron Massy. These two last saw what seemed to them an unhealthy situation and they judged it to be caused by an unhealthy object.

M. Dutour alone seems to have realized that the movement was already out of Bernadette's hands. "It is no longer because of the girl that the crowd comes back ; it

is no longer she who raises the breeze that carries them there."

The Curé Peyramale having the responsibility on his shoulders was apparently suffering from anxiety. The Abbé Pène, secretly believing, apparently also suffered from an anxiety. Only the Abbé Pomian seems to have been objective, amused, and unstirred. He laughed long and loud that her sanity had even been questioned.

Meanwhile Bernadette's life was not unpleasant. She dined at the table of a former magistrate who was a member of the bar. She was called over by the Abbé Serres to talk to some ladies who had asked to see her and was overwhelmed with caresses and asked for her prayers.

Jacomets felt all this to be unfortunate and since his convictions were deeply resented by the people he must have been sincere for he held them in spite of the fact that he heard "the sullen rumbling of which his position was the object," as he puts it.

Put on his mettle because he believed falsely in the cure of the blind girl of Luz, the Curé Peyramale was now a veritable hunter of fresh miracles. Baron Massy was perturbed at this, but seemed to feel that he still had the Bishop behind him, and the Bishop agreed that the occurrences at the grotto should be stopped at all costs.

Curé Peyramale resented the implication constantly made that the Abbé Pomian was urging Bernadette toward the grotto, and with some heat he wrote the Bishop to that effect. And he defended also the action of Abbé Serres for having Bernadette called in to talk to the ladies. Nevertheless, when Father Peyramale got through defending his assistants to the Bishop, he gave them fresh orders to abstain from every step, word or even smile, that might be compromising. But the Curé Peyramale was evidently not afraid of the Bishop.

Jacomets was waiting for what might be called "an incident," and Baron Massy apparently would have welcomed an "incident" too.

But the people were having a fine time. Rumors flew. No one seemed to have known anyone who had been blind or deaf or lame, but who could now see or hear or walk, yet nearly everyone knew someone who knew someone who had. Even the Prefect was beginning to see that locking Bernadette up was not the solution, but he did not know what was.

The grotto was a chapel by Easter although it had not been sanctioned by the Church. Twenty-one candles lighted it and a little plaster statue of the Virgin had been placed in the upper niche where it stood on a carpet of grass and flowers. On the evening of the third day of the Easter festival word went around that Bernadette would go to the grotto the next morning; and so, early on Wednesday, the 7th of April, the crowd began to congregate.

Before Bernadette went, however, she was interviewed by a well-known man of Pau: M. de Rességuier. He had come to Lourdes to present a chasuble to the Curé Peyramale and had gone to talk to Bernadette and later followed her to the grotto. His interview may be considered typical of those she was to have all the rest of her life. He subjected her to a most detailed questioning, "urgent and insidious" as the Curé Peyramale called it. She answered, he said, "with circumspection far above her age, and, it would seem, far above her intelligence." He objected to her statement that the Blessed Virgin had spoken in the patois, "since God and the Blessed Virgin do not know the patois."

"How do you know that they aren't acquainted with it?" she countered.

He offered her a very beautiful figurine of Jesus, but she refused it. "Then," he said, "say a dozen beads for me before the grotto and I will give you this book."

"I will say the dozen beads for you," she answered, "but I don't want your book."

The Eighteenth Apparition, Wednesday, April 7th

She arrived at the grotto with her usual group : her parents and a few devoted people. She lit her cheap little candle and taking it in her left hand, and her beads in her right, began to say her rosary. She fixed her eyes as usual on the opening above the grotto. She smiled ; she bowed. And then she went over close to the grotto and stood there, smiling at times, and bowing at others.

There was a wind along the river that day and at intervals Bernadette would protect her candle flame by spreading out the fingers of her right hand which held her beads so that the flame appeared to blow against them. She was followed step by step by Dr. Dozous.

She prayed a long time, perhaps three-quarters of an hour. And the people who were there prayed also with great fervor.

Then, with her friends and family, she left.

Dr. Dozous believed that he had witnessed a miracle. When she was a little distance away he stopped her and asked to see her hand. It was his belief that the flame had been directly against her skin but he could see no sign of a burn. He lighted the candle again and held it against her skin, presumably to see if she were anesthetic to pain, but she drew her hand away exclaiming that he had burned her.

He did not report this until three days later to the Commissioner of Police who sent it on to the Prefect. The physician told the story many times thereafter but he changed details and shifted the candle from hand to hand.

There is among the windows of the present church at Lourdes one showing this supposed scene : Bernadette's hands glowing like a furnace. But Père Cros studying all

of this material at first hand did not believe it. In 1878 Bernadette, asked about this occasion, had answered laughingly as Père Cros puts it, "It is not true; Dr. Dozous is a prevaricator." *

And the Abbé Pène, after discrediting Dr. Dozous' account because his sister was close to the scene and saw nothing unusual, says, "Dr. Dozous was never considered, at Lourdes, as a man whose witness could be taken seriously." Certainly Bernadette's own statement, "it is not true," is adequate.

Until this time Dr. Dozous was not a believer in the apparitions, but from this time on he began to declare that they were real.

The bitterness between the local clergy and the civil authorities was growing rapidly. The Curé Peyramale wrote to the Bishop on the 10th of April that "it is a cowardly and odious lie" that the clergy were putting Bernadette up to going to the grotto. Baron Massy held firmly to the statement that only "the double authorization of the ecclesiastical and civil powers" could justify setting up an oratory. And the people of Lourdes were doing just this without authority and thereby violating the penal code.

Fresh fuel was now added to all the fires for visionaries were springing up in flocks. Within a few days six apparitions were reported. Abbé Pène, who confessed one of these girls, began to believe that perhaps all of the new apparitions were diabolical.

Since most of these new apparitions were being seen in Bernadette's grotto, the Mayor appointed a committee

* Cros, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 458: "Interrogée, à ce propos, Bernadette elle-même a répondu gaiement, en 1878, 'ce n'est pas vrai; M. Dozous est un menteur.'"

to study the formation of the rocks and the lighting in that place.

At about this time he wrote : "What is called the grotto consists of an immense over-hanging shelf of rock which slants back inward and downward toward a circular cavern. In the roof of this cavern, about two and a half metres from the ground, the orifice of a corridor is to be seen. To reach this opening, a ladder must be used ; and when one has climbed to the top of the ladder, in order to advance, one has to squeeze into this opening like a lizard into a crack, crawling flat on one's stomach for a distance of about four or five metres.

"There have gone into this corridor not only men but also girls and women, whom modesty ought to have held back at the first step of an exploration which would force them to bend and twist into all manner of indecent positions."

On the 19th of April the Mayor's committee, composed of an architect, an under-director of the Farm-School at Visens, a municipal clerk, a roadmaker, a town constable and the Mayor's secretary, clambered up into the opening. The Mayor's secretary knelt where the visionaries had knelt and the others placed a candle where the candle had been. But none could see the things that the visionaries had seen !

The sick and miserable continued to come to the house of André Sajoux. If Bernadette had not forbidden him to accept anything he could have been the richest man in Lourdes, he said. Three gentlemen from Pau came to the house, bringing with them a sick girl, and they begged Bernadette to embrace her or to touch her chest. But Bernadette was firm. "It is not my business to cure her ; wash her in the water of the grotto." When Sa-

joux took them to the door they offered him a handful of gold which he declined.

Cures were reported on every hand. Listed and classified by Jacomet they were reported to the Baron Massy who ends his account by saying, "I am on burning ground, but I walk without fear."

Not only were the officials reporting on miraculous occurrences presumably happening to other people, but other people were reporting on miraculous occurrences presumably happening to the officials. It was said that one night M. Dutour was awakened suddenly by lightning flashes and claps of thunder which filled his bedroom and that he saw before his eyes two lighted tapers floating in the air. They said that he threw himself out of the bed and took refuge in a neighbor's house where they had great difficulty in calming him. Gossip promptly added ninety-eight more candles, for shortly the tale was retold with a hundred candles instead of two.

Amidst all this Dr. Dozous recanted his skepticism while the authorities exclaimed, "Is this levity? Is this cerebral effervescence? Is this malice? For whoever knows Dr. Dozous, it can be all of these."

Casterot, the tinsmith, made a basin of zinc with three pipes, and Tarbès, Fourcade and several others helped him to put it into the hole for the water to gather in. They worked in the evenings after their regular working hours were over. Blind people, paralytics, the incurably ill came in great crowds. They came in carriages, or on foot, until the banks of the Gave became an outdoor hospital.

Candles burned night and day, and gifts began to embellish the altar. Crosses of gold and hearts of gold, and rings and bracelets and earrings, until the three plaster

statues of the Virgin were literally weighed down with crowns and with artificial flowers while around their necks hung chains and medallions.

Working men had widened the road, blasting away the rock that obstructed it. There were in all about two dozen of them working there, and finally they constructed a wooden railing which gave the place the appearance of a real chapel.

And from the proudest to the humblest they left gifts. A poor tailor from Tarbes, named Jacquet, who had been paralyzed for twelve years, had himself brought in a cart and threw amongst the offerings the first gold piece of the value of ten francs. And a poverty-stricken old woman from the Asson brought a cheese and five francs besides, which she threw into the basket, crying, "It is all for the Blessed Virgin!"

Only the presence of Bernadette was lacking. She, worn out apparently with strain and the insatiable curiosity of the public, was at home in bed.

15

Croizine Bouhohorts swept the streets of the town to help support her family which was then living in rooms at Mademoiselle Sabathe's in a house facing on Marcadal Square. A certain Françonnette Gozol also lived in this place.

Justin, Croizine's baby, was nearly two years old, but for eighteen months of those two years he had been ill — fever, and more fever. When the first of May came he had been very ill indeed for six days. He had drunk nothing and he was parched and dried out, living only with that persistence which babies sometimes show.

It was about five o'clock in the evening when Françonnette said to Croizine, "Give me a shirt now so I can change your little one's clothing, for he is about dead."

Then a voice seemed to say to Croizine, "Pick up this child and take it to the grotto!"

"You are mad," her husband said, "he is dead, or almost, and he will die on the way."

"Living or dead," she answered, "I will take him to the grotto." So she wrapped him in a blanket and in her apron, and as she went down the stairs with him she began to pray. She recited the first five *Paters* and *Aves* in honor of the Passion of the Lord Jesus that He might return her child to her. And then she said others to the Blessed Virgin, so that she would pray to God to return the child, and then to the saints, and finally to the souls in Purgatory.

There were more than a hundred people at the grotto when, bearing her inert burden she slipped through them close to the little statue of the Virgin which was in a niche on the sand. There she prayed, not daring to look at her child for fear that it was really dead.

The water was collecting in the basin. It ran out in three little streams. And suddenly she heard the voice as of someone telling her, "Make the sign of the cross, and go put the little one in the water."

So she got up and went to the fountain. She took off the blanket and the little shirt and, holding him in her two hands, she let the water run over him. Women came to her and said, "Take that child out of that water." Marie Peyras, less kind than the others, said aloud, "She wants to kill him : one less ; she has others."

Nevertheless she held him there. "I want to do what I can. The Good God and the Blessed Virgin will help me." But he did not move and so, wrapping him again and praying again before the little statue, she left. All the way home on that road she said the rosary. She had always said it on that road, always, even long before the apparitions.

Then she took the baby back home and, calling to her husband to warm a blanket, she began to put him in his cradle. "Warm it yourself," said her husband in despair. "He is as nearly dead as when you left."

She sat by the cradle that night, sleepless. Toward morning, around daybreak, she looked in the cradle — and the child was smiling. Several times that day he took the breast.

The next day, while she was making her bed, she heard an exclamation from Françoquette : "Croizine, is this your little one walking along the gallery ? Has he slipped out of his bed alone ? Oh, it is indeed a miracle ! for he

was as dead as the dead in the graveyard and now he lives !”

Fanny Nicolau was not to be caught napping. The rumor was going around that something was going to happen at the grotto, and she hurried there for her picture of the Virgin with a Bird and her image of the Sacred Heart and took them away with her.

It was the fourth of May. The Baron Massy had summoned the thirty-seven mayors of the county, the Imperial Commissioner, and the Police Commissioner to meet him in Lourdes. Having given the order to the Police Commissioner to go to the grotto and remove all of the objects and take them to the city hall where the owners could claim them, he betook himself to the council chamber to address the assembled mayors. He pointed out to them the complete absurdity of the scenes that were taking place in Lourdes and tried especially to make them understand that attendance at the grotto was a direct slap both at the authority of the bishop and of the civil authorities. He said that he could claim without fear of contradiction to have given enough proof of his respect for the great truths of the Catholic religion for the people not to misinterpret his intentions.

He had ordered that those people claiming to see apparitions should be detained and taken to the hospital at Tarbes where they would be treated as sick people at the expense of the *département*. And furthermore he would consider liable for prosecution all who might spread false news or who helped put into circulation the absurd rumors which were rampant.

It was a long speech and was received “with unanimous sentiment.”

The Prefect’s order had gone out to the Mayor and

the Mayor's order had gone to M. Jacomet, who went at once to Léon Latapie, the town roadmaker, and told him to go and get a cart to carry back into town the objects which were at the grotto.

"And what if I can't find a cart?" Léon asked.

"If you can't find one," the Commissioner replied testily, "you will carry everything on your back."

So Latapie went first to the firm of Frères Abbadie-Provence, but as soon as they found out what he wanted the cart for they refused. He didn't even have a chance to offer them money! Then he went to Latour, the grain merchant, then to Blanchard's, the Swiss, always with the same result. And when he tried to argue with these people one and all they said that the things that were at the grotto should remain there and that they would be no party to the removal.

Finally Latapie resorted to strategy. He went to Jean Bourdette, the blacksmith, and suppressing some of the truth merely stated that the Mayor wanted the horse and cart. The Mayor had been good to Jean Bourdette and so without asking what was wanted with them he let Latapie take them away.

Back in the house the blacksmith's wife and his daughter Eugénie did not know what had happened until suddenly they heard women shouting in the street in front of their house, "May the devil break your horse's neck! May he die!" They were so frightened that they did not dare go out that way, so they slipped out a back door and ran down the road to get the cart and horse back.

The road which led to the grotto was bordered with a wild sweet-scented growth of box and blossoming hawthorn and wild rose. The foliage was fresh and green; even the moss on the rocks was a tender green, and wild young plants filled all the crevices. When Latapie with

the horse and cart had come to the end of the wood road, he heard the women of the Bourdette family shouting to him. They were crying, too, and they called out, "If it's for that, then we don't want to have anything to do with it," and they seized the horse's head to turn him about. There was great difficulty getting rid of them.

"You are going to get me in a jam," Latapie shouted at them. "I have orders and I am responsible."

Jacomet who was walking on ahead was at last overtaken by the Bourdette women who had now been joined by others. Pale with anger they addressed him. But M. Jacomet, having the upper hand, replied with great calm: "Ladies, I advise you to withdraw! I am acting under higher orders. This is none of my doing and it troubles me as much to do it as it does you to see it." This did not satisfy the women, but a man standing near by spoke to them and assured them that they would get themselves into a lot of trouble, and so finally they stopped.

Callet, Boyrie, Vergez and Viron, all town employees, had to go down with Jacomet. He called to Latapie to come on down and help too, but the latter had a good excuse. "If I go down," he answered, "they will take the horse away," and so he was spared, and waited by the road at the top of the cliff.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. A dozen people perhaps, were kneeling there, praying. Vergez, the gamekeeper, went down first, and he went directly to the spring and drank, not because he was thirsty, but because he did not want to be the first to touch the things in the grotto. His eyes were wet, too.

Callet did not like the idea either. He had seen the "Little One" from the beginning and his faith in her did not desert him at an order from the police. He did not

feel particularly courageous about removing all these pious objects.

The Commissioner noticed their reluctance. "Hurry up! Hurry up!" he said. And the kneeling people were murmuring a little, "It's too bad to take those things away."

In the end it was M. Jacomet who had to make the start. He began by putting out the oil lamp hanging at the right. It was an old lamp with a place for three candles but refitted for oil. Next he went and got the plaster statue of the Virgin in the corner at the back, but he had scarcely got it in his hands when it shattered into innumerable bits. He was so astonished that his pipe fell out of his mouth and also broke. And from that moment on he dusted his hands of the whole affair; he touched nothing more, but contented himself with saying, "Come on! Hurry up. We must go!"

There were found pictures and rosaries and statues. There was linen in the form of flax, for in that country when one cannot give linen one gives a bundle of flax. Sometimes such a bundle was worth 50 centimes. There were candles and flowers and a few chains of gold or silver. And there were rosaries hanging everywhere and some books, and two old church candelabra, and a cheese, and some vases of flowers. There was even a watch belonging to a young woman of Pontacq, who had died a few days previous. She had given it to the grotto before she died and her husband had brought it there.

Then there was the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the little holder; Boyrie took that one. And there were two others, which Callet took. He broke nothing!

And when it was all gathered up they put the statues in a box, and the rosaries and other objects of piety in an-

other box and the linen in the corner of the cart. Then they posted a sign which read : "It is forbidden to place anything in the Grotto : all offenders will be rigorously prosecuted." With the Commissioner leading along the flowering road, they followed with the horse and cart.

By this time there were people all along the road ; men and women muttering in little groups. Someone called out angrily, "If we had been there, both the cart and the horse would have been in the Gave." At the old bridge there were some thirty stone-cutters coming down toward them shouting. They were not afraid for themselves, Latapie said, but they were apprehensive about the horse even getting back to Lourdes.

When Jacomet and his assistants returned the council was still sitting in the town hall. As soon as they reached it they opened the large iron swinging gates, backed the horse around and hurried the horse and cart into the passage. After that the gates were shut. A place had been swept and prepared in advance for the pious objects. The statues were left in the box, but the rosaries were hung up on a cord.

During that same day the Baron Massy had had a little conference with the Curé Peyramale "who seemed to applaud the motives which had dictated my conduct." And before leaving town he advised the police to let it be known that, "every person who alleged that he or she saw an apparition would be arrested immediately and taken to the hospital at Tarbes." In making his report to the Minister of Worship however, he was not quite so confident as he had seemed. "All is probably not ended," he said. "Yet I think that I can give your Excellency assurance that an oratory will not be re-established."

The Mayor was more optimistic. He even began to

take credit. "M. le Préfet personally ordered nothing ; it was the local authorities who recommended what was carried out by the Police Commissioner. The grotto belongs to the Commune of Lourdes. People will continue doubtless to visit the grotto, but if the clergy lends the support of its wisdom to the efforts of the civil authorities, I am confident that this regrettable movement which until today has been steadily on the increase, will have entered into its period of decline."

As for the sign which had been put up, the people had precedent for an answer had they cared to make it. In the 18th century at the time of the suppression of the activities of the Jansenists a sign had been written secretly on the gates of the cemetery of Saint-Médard :

"By order of the King :
It is forbidden to God
to perform miracles in
this place."

The next day M. Jacomet returned with his men — Latapie, Callet and Vergez — to the grotto to remove the railing which had made it seem so much like an altar. But then it was discovered that the hatchet had been forgotten and it was necessary to borrow one from Pierre Bonaïse who was working at the Savy sawmill. Pierre did not know to what use it was to be put.

But before many hours this man figured in numerous stories. It was told that almost at once he had dropped a plank on his feet and both of them were crushed. The people indeed prophesied that accidents would befall all who had had a hand in the removal of the things at the grotto. The rumor went around that the wife of Bourdette who lent his horse to take away the pious objects

had fallen in the hay loft, and to make an even more artistic story, it was said she had also broken two of her ribs. For Bourdette himself they prophesied bad luck, but most of all for the poor horse. The Procurator hearing these rumors set about finding out who had started them and wrote to M. Dutour, "I pledge you to have the authors found and brought before the tribunals in accordance with the law."

Toward evening the town-crier went about informing the people that the various objects taken from the grotto were at the City Hall and could be reclaimed. The women of Lourdes ran hurriedly, and, says M. Estrade, "they reclaimed not only the objects which belonged to them, but even things which did not." The watch, alas, had disappeared and it was never found again.

Much to the relief of the authorities, torrential mountain rains began to fall. On the 6th of May at eight in the morning, there were only two lighted candles in the grotto and but three women praying there. As on the following day the rains continued, the crowd did not reassemble. At 7 a.m. there were only branches of flowering hawthorn in the grotto, and a picture of Saint John.

On the 7th Bernadette, accompanied by a distant relative, the wife of a sergeant, went to Cauterets, a nearby watering-place. May is not yet a busy month at those watering resorts and expenses are not so great; even that of course would have been beyond the Soubirous. But in a letter of August 7th, written by the Bishop, there is a statement that in order to remove the temptation to return to the grotto from the mind of Bernadette, she was sent by the Curé of Lourdes to the waters of Cauterets.

She was to remain there for two weeks and she went

to bathe regularly at the baths of Bruzeaud. It is doubtful if she got much rest, as people questioned her continually and the sick spoke to her. She answered them always that if they believed in God they would be healed. She always refused money and gifts and she refused to touch people.

When she left Lourdes the Prefect wrote at once to the Police Commissioner at Cauterets to have her watched.

Thursday, May the 13th, Ascension Day of that year, did not go by unmarked, but contributed a martyr to the cause. People came running up from the grotto greatly agitated, announcing that a prophet dressed in white was preaching at the grotto. He was a thick-set man clad very eccentrically in a cloak of white cloth, white trousers, and a gray felt hat, bordered with black, cocked on one side. Long hair fell over his shoulders and a thick beard and bushy eyebrows covered his face. He poured maledictions on all who had dared to place hands on the sacred objects. He announced himself to have been sent by God and the Blessed Virgin. "I distribute at will chastisements and recompense : the shaking of the earth, the thunder, the hail, the rain, the sun, illness and death obey my command." But before he could quite unchain the pestilence on the crops which he promised he was led away by the Commissioner of Police. His name was Jean Marre. He was put in prison, but on the last day of May he was declared mad and sent on his way.

The excitement about the prophet was hardly quieted, when news came that hawkers and pedlars were selling medals in honor of miracles at the grotto. And finally, to make matters as bad as possible, it was rumored that

pilgrimages of the sick were being organized to come to Lourdes in procession.

The Mayor meanwhile had sent a sample of the water to be analyzed. He had his mind grimly set on a summer resort.

A few days of comparative peace followed. And then on May 18th Abbé Pomian mentioned to his sister a letter by Paul Auguez of Paris published in the *Intérêt Public* of May 11th. That the letter eulogized Bernadette seems to have been at least the one crumb of truth in the large loaf of talk that followed. Abbé Pomian is certainly not above suspicion of having encouraged the rumors concerning it, although perhaps he had forgotten to say to his sister just who wrote the letter or exactly what it contained.

Cyprine Gesta ran a bakehouse, and on the morning on which the Abbé Pomian read the letter, women were there washing Cyprine's linen. One of them was the mother of Bernadette who in great excitement was telling the news to the others. She had learned it of the butcher's wife, who had it of Mademoiselle Pomian and Fourcade, the sacristan. The women must have gone early to the bakehouse that day, for by eight o'clock the whole town had heard the good news. It was something like this: first there was a letter eulogizing Bernadette; then it became a letter from Paris; then the writer asked prayers of Bernadette; then the letter was a notice from the Minister of Worship now addressed to Bernadette at Cauterets, now to the Mayor or Curé; then the letter contained six hundred francs and an entreaty for prayer; then it contained the authorization for the raising of an oratory; then again it was from the Empress with a beautiful gift and (artistic detail) the wish that the Little One would be happy; or again it was

no longer a request but a demand from the Minister of Worship that all the devotional objects be taken back, and finally it was from the Emperor himself who asked for prayers and ordered the reopening of the grotto. And the letter, they added, was already in the Mayor's hands.

People collected to discuss the news : they asked each other what time it would all take place — this reopening of the grotto — and they all volunteered to help. "And," says Jacomet in despair, "I do not exaggerate, M. le Préfet, when I say that this simple false rumor has been enough to take us back, after all these days, to the former conditions at the grotto !"

Visitors flocked there in crowds. At about three in the afternoon Jacomet and his men descended and took away a plaster statue of the Virgin, a wooden cross, two artificial bouquets, some pictures of the Blessed Virgin, two candles, and two francs, twenty centimes.

"They were all prattling about it," said Cyprine Gesta, "and I prattled like the rest."

In the end the story was sifted back to Louis Fourcade, the sacristan, and to the sister of the Abbé Pomian, and these two were reported by the Commissioner of Police to the Imperial Procurator who ordered them to appear before the Magistrate. Both the Commissioner and the Magistrate hoped to make an example of them.

In the end, however, Mademoiselle Pomian could point to the letter of M. Paul Auguez, of which she had spoken. It was indeed a nice letter and Auguez was a Cavalier of the Royal Order of Charles II and a member of the Société des Gens de Lettres of France. Three of the women (Cyprine Gesta, Anna Dupas and Joséphe Barinque) were summoned to appear, however, and their trial set for an early date.

Bernadette's knowledge of church doctrine was still imperfect, but when on June the 3rd the members of her catechism class received their first Communion she was allowed to come also. She was permitted to receive Communion as a favor, for the priests knew that she would return to the class to complete her instruction. It was on the Feast of Corpus Christi that she made her first Communion with great absorption in the chapel of the hospice. The Abbé Pomian officiated.

The next day Curé Peyramale wrote the Bishop of this and of Bernadette's attitude. It is interesting to consider the change that had occurred in the attitude of the clergy toward her in the short time from the first of February to the first of June. She who had had to fight for her right to enter the confirmation class and had been pushed about by the entire community as of no possible importance, was now the subject of correspondence between the Bishop and the Curé.

The Mayor was now ready to sweep the whole thing out with a broom. There had been talk of a miracle in the hospital at Tarbes. News of it was being spread by Dr. Dozous. And Jacomet in a state of rising temper writes, "Allow me to say that if official statements are made concerning the miracle in that hospital, I will have Dr. Dozous in the police reformatory; he is an ardent propagator of false rumors."

But a more serious threat was being made by the Mayor: that if Bernadette went again to the grotto he would have her secretly arrested so as not to anger the population, and he would send her to Tarbes to be placed in the mental hospital. Jacomet considered this threat a great indiscretion. He felt the Mayor had only to exert his personal influence to stop her from going,

and failing that, he himself could see that it didn't happen by his own mere presence at the grotto.

But most of the visitors to the grotto were now absorbed in watching new visionaries : among them a man and a boy, and most distressing to the Mayor, his own maidservant.

The sign ordering people to desist from decorating the grotto had not been enough. Candles and flowers and crosses were appearing again. The Mayor issued another order as of June the 8th, forbidding use of the water and trespass on the property. Then the Mayor took carpenters and went down to the grotto and made a strong high barrier.

They made a large sign and planted it on a stout post. By a bit of irony of fate, the post was a piece of the wood which François Soubirous had been unjustly accused of stealing and which had not been returned to him after his acquittal but left lying around the police station.

Just to remain on the safe side, M. Jacomet posted a guard — Vergez, Latapie, and Callet — one or the other to be always on hand. They were to have notebooks and to take the names of all who went down.

It was no easy job. Callet's was the day duty. All day long people came.

"You go away from here," he would say, "you compromise me." If they persisted, he took their names and gave them to the Commissioner who made depositions.

Even Callet's dog, Mouton, came to the assistance of the people. The dog would go home with Callet to dinner, but as soon as he reached the bridge in returning, the dog would leave him and run to the grotto. "It was as if God had given him the idea," said Callet. "It was the wish of the good God that Mouton should want to play that trick ; everyone admired it."

Early on the morning of the 19th, as M. Jacomet was returning from a neighboring town, he learned that the barrier to the grotto had been destroyed and thrown into the Gave. But the boards were picked up by the police and the necessary repairs and replacements were made.

The legend eventually grew up that the quarrymen had destroyed the barricade. Many legends in fact grew up about the quarrymen. They were a courageous and vigorous lot of men, disciplined and very religious. Estrade in his dramatic and inaccurate account has them converge on the grotto singing the "litany of the Blessed Virgin, in the traditional rhythm of the Pyrenees — an immense voice, composed of all the voices, filled the valley with a majestic and solemn *ora pro nobis*." It is such a charming and dramatic detail! It is with reluctance that one has to admit that it is false.

It is Père Cros' conclusion that the destroyers of the barriers, three or four in number, were not quarrymen and not from Lourdes, and he adds that he knew who they were.

Apparently at last the people decided on a formal protest. They got between three and four hundred signatures to a petition to the Minister of Worship and Public Instruction begging him to order an inquiry into the situation. On the same day the Curé Peyramale addressed a letter to him. One statement in his letter is of great interest, as he says that the grotto was regularly attracting from two to six thousand visitors daily.

The most important petition, however, was addressed by the people to the Emperor, Louis Napoleon. It was M. Jacomet's opinion that Dr. Dozous was responsible for these petitions by the people.

In Lourdes during the summer of 1858, M. Jacomet and the other authorities were in the position of men trying to put out a forest fire with a bucket of water. More than three hundred visionaries of both sexes, all ages, and all stations moved to and fro in the neighborhood of the grotto. And they were followed there by a large part of the population. M. D'Angla, the police sergeant, seeing how things were going "was angry with the good God for permitting so many absurdities to take place under the mask of Religion!" And M. Jacomet said that, "if the clergy saw any miracle in the shameful comedy, he was going to turn Protestant the next day."

The grotto of the Massabielle was not the immediate scene of these apparitions, but the spring called Merlasse and the spring called Brioulento, and the meadows across the river. All were in full view of the grotto.

Catherine Labayle who lived in a house on the road to the wood saw bands of visionaries pass before the door daily. Dozens of them, usually young children, with crowns of flowers on their heads, followed by the townspeople in procession, chanted the litanies.

One day Rosine Maillet saw people following a little girl in procession. The girl would stop them and make them kiss the ground. Rosine arrived on the scene just as they were getting up, and immediately the little girl pointed her out. "There must be someone here who has not kissed the ground!" Rosine hastened to confess her fault and kneeling, kissed the ground. In the bottom of her heart she felt, "No one knows what this is!" But

Rosine did not believe that it all came from the Virgin. She, like many others, feared it was of the devil, for one day, following another visionary, she saw the girl turn to Madeleine Lacaze and say to her, "Woman, withdraw : the Blessed Virgin doesn't want you to go farther." Madeleine was a very pious spinster and she wept but withdrew. Her unhappiness was very great. "The Blessed Virgin doesn't want me in her company," she told Rosine. That put many doubts in Rosine's mind, "For that's foolishness !" she said. "That can't be true. The Blessed Virgin loves us all !"

One evening, when night had already fallen, a procession of child visionaries went down to the spring called Merlasse and then on to the grotto. Their heads were crowned with laurel and they cried out, "All of you say your rosaries ; the good God is going to recite it." Ursule Nicolau heard this. Half the town was there ! And she thought, "Is the world upside down that the good God prays to the Blessed Virgin ? These people are seduced !" She laughed and at the same time was angry to see such devilry.

Down in the neighborhood of the grotto things were even worse. There the children, holding lighted candles, knelt on the banks of the river with troubled little faces. If anyone shook them and asked, "What are you seeing ?" they would answer : "I saw the Blessed Virgin with a white robe and a blue sash," or, "I saw the Blessed Virgin with a crown on her head."

Often the little children would not have gone to the grotto but for the women. They would call by for those whom they thought had seen the Virgin and sometimes it would be ten or ten-thirty at night before they returned. But if the women frightened the children by

taking them there at night the children often had their revenge.

Sometimes the children cried ; they didn't know why. Sometimes they saw apparitions of men as well as women. The apparitions would go from one tree to another where the children, their arms in air, would pursue them, shrieking. They wanted only new and unblessed rosaries and they would hold them up, the Cross before their eyes, and run around half bent over, grimacing, and crying like dogs barking after game. There was one fifteen-year-old boy whose name was Minino. His face became so frightful that they were afraid to look at him ; and he brayed like an ass. He clutched at things, and rolled his eyes, and made his teeth click.

One day word went around that the Virgin herself intended to crown this boy. Not trusting the Virgin to produce the crown, he carried one with him under his coat and when the apparition failed him he drew it out and crowned himself.

A priest, certain that what he was witnessing was the fury of hell, planted wooden crosses at the summit of the Massabielle and said to them all, "What you are seeing is the opposite of true."

The gendarmes were helpless. They could only chase the visionaries away crying, "Go away from here, subjects of Satan !"

Lourdes was indeed having difficulties in carrying on even the ordinary affairs of life. Frère Léobard, the director of the schools, often found his pupils absent. "The devil caused an infinity of visionaries," he said. "And their extravagances were produced not only at the grotto . . . but also at their homes, where they had improvised little shrines."

Little Jean, who was about ten years old, had seen an apparition. His mother made a little shrine for him in a large room upstairs in their home, and gave him a crucifix and a statue of the Blessed Virgin, four lighted candles and a coil of funeral candle. Many people went there in the evening at the hour set. He would kneel and say the rosary and soon he would go into ecstasy and have visions. One day he fell into a faint but no one was worried.

His father was dangerously ill and they asked him to pray for his father but he replied, "Don't grieve! The good God died for us and my father will die also."

One evening while he was having an ecstasy before his shrine, a girl of eight who also saw visions began to cry, "Oh! Oh! I see the devil, with horns and crooked nails; he wants to claw my face." They were all very frightened. Only Jean was not afraid. He got up, opened the window, sprinkled the room with holy water and called out, "Fear nothing!" This boy, Jean, had visions for a long time. As late as Epiphany, January 6th of the following year, he saw the three Magi, each one carrying a stick with a ribbon on the end.

The Curé Peyramale forbade the children to go to the grotto under penalty of being excluded from catechism classes but he felt discretion to be very necessary. "The population is becoming more and more excited; it would take only a spark to start a great fire."

Just at that time ten-year-old Laurent Lacaze from the nearby town of Ossen supplied the spark. He "received a mission" to come to the grotto at Lourdes and lead the Blessed Virgin away, back to the town of Ossen. The whole population of Omex and Segur as well as that of Ossen were behind him.

Laurent came to the grotto accompanied by many peo-

ple and he saw a lady dressed in white, with a gay white bonnet. On one arm was a festoon of red ribbon ; in her hand three red roses ; on her other arm she carried a small child on whose head was a red bonnet tied with red ribbon and topped with three white roses. He too held three red roses in his hand. Beside the lady there were two men dressed in black with blue caps.

The boy claimed to have seen this singular quartet leave the rock and take the road for Ossen. The people followed the boy. But a short distance out of Lourdes the apparitions said to him, "We are going back to Lourdes," and they disappeared.

So he went to the grotto again the next day, and on July 4th he went again. This day the company of apparitions was considerably augmented. By the side of the lady there was a man dressed in white with a white hat, carrying a globe in his hands. She addressed this man as "lou boun Diu" (the good God). Suddenly the people heard a voice come from the interior of the grotto ; it was a very delicate voice, like that of an affected child. Many heard the voice, both the people of Ossen and the people of Lourdes. It said, "In the Valley of Batsurguère, and especially at Ossen, there are many good people ; at Lourdes there is nothing but rabble."

As the people of Batsurguère left that day, the visionary saw the unearthly group waiting for him on the road. The lady ordered him to form a procession. First walked "lou boun Diu" then the lady between the two men. After them in long lines, the men and women of the audience equally divided by Laurent into two camps ; the good and the bad. They were followed by a group from Lourdes. All of them, Batsurguère or Lourdes, good or bad, carried their rosaries. "Joyous in

the thought that the Blessed Virgin was coming with us, we sang the litanies aloud."

At Omex the boy climbed up on a wall and preached them "an exhortation, which lasted a long time and was very fine."

These apparitions at Ossen lasted several weeks and completely obsessed the populace. People quit work and prayed and celebrated. When someone remonstrated with Laurent's father over his lost days of work he answered, "Yes, but at least we have fine company at home, that of the Blessed Virgin."

Men and women going to or coming from the fields stopped and knelt in sight of the Lacaze house, and facing it, prayed.

The children spent their days racing about, howling and making gestures, and their nights saying litanies for houses full of praying people.

In 1878 Père Cros hunted up a great many of these child visionaries both of Ossen and Lourdes to see what their end had been. They grew up, all of them, to "live in an honest and Christian manner; the spirit of lying took advantage of their innocence; but none of them made himself a malicious accomplice of Satan." Twenty years later Laurent Lacaze retained no memories of either his apparitions or of his actions and gestures.

One morning during the excitement created by Laurent a stranger coming from Saint-Pé looked over toward the grotto as he came by, and there he saw "the Blessed Virgin, who was walking around; everyone saw her." Instantly minds were on fire. Two or three hundred men, women, and children dropped their work to run to the grotto. Not finding the Virgin there they climbed over the barrier and began to draw water from the spring. Into this scene walked Commissioner Jacomet and his assistants to draw up accusations and issue summonses.

The next Sunday night, toward dawn, the barrier was again destroyed, the boards broken and thrown into the river. It was ordered reassembled and rebuilt.

Of course the Commissioner wrote all of this to Baron Massy. His letters are an astonishing monument to his optimism. Each letter ends with the belief that the worst is now over, and the next inevitably begins with an announcement of new breaches of the law.

At this juncture the Minister of Worship answered the petitions. He suggested that the enormous number of fines and sentences were perhaps creating a dangerous situation. But his solution does not seem to have pleased anyone unless it were the Mayor, for he has only the suggestion that a company be formed to exploit the mineral value of the springs and establish a resort. Accordingly, Baron Massy ordered a fresh examination of the water and sat back to await results.

July 4th is the local feast day of Lourdes : the feast of

St. Peter and St. Paul. The public celebration lasted well into the morning and was completed by a further uprooting of the post with the sign on it and the destruction of the barrier. It was really not necessary to destroy the post. The water in the Gave was very low, visitors could cross by stepping stones from the opposite banks and thus avoid passing it. But it had become a form of public protest to destroy it. The Mayor was beginning to get discouraged. "If you have other ideas, my dear Prefect," he wrote, "be so good as to give your instructions to me."

The Mayor could think of nothing better than to threaten to arrest the children, "being convinced in advance that their parents would come to get them out." And the Prefect could make no better suggestion to the Mayor than a new and stronger barricade to replace the last one. Accordingly one was made of thicker planks and larger nails. It lasted until the end of the prohibition of the use of the grotto and it closed it completely. "My warnings," the Mayor wrote the Prefect ". . . will probably end, by producing their effect. It is one o'clock in the afternoon: no one has appeared, either on the road, or in the places near the grotto."

On the morning of the 12th of July, Dr. Dozous herded into vehicles the three women — Anna Dupas, Joséphe Barinque and Cyprine Gesta, who had been tried for spreading false news and whose case had been appealed to Pau, the capital of the *département*, where it would be reheard. On the way over they called to all the people they met, "Pray for us, because they are going to judge us at Pau!"

The party paused at Bétharram to pray at the famous shrine of Our Lady. There they met Sisters from the

convent at Igon. "Pray for us, dear Mothers, for they are going to judge us at Pau!"

"Be calm," the nuns responded, "the whole convent is going to pray for you!"

Dr. Dozous took the women to the house of some good friends, for there were three days to be spent at Pau. Joséphe Barinque, at least, spent them in weeping and ate almost nothing. The defendants did not lack for lawyers: several offered to defend them, but a M. Caza-bonne took the case over and defended them for nothing.

It was mid-afternoon. The room was full of people, for "the people of Pau love religion so much." There were police also. Anna Dupas was terribly frightened; she thought that surely she would be put in jail and never see Lourdes again. Also she did not understand French very well and she continued to interrupt her lawyer who had to say to Cyprine Gesta, "Make that cursed woman keep quiet."

The women hid their faces in their shawls and wept while the district attorney was speaking against them. The attorney was reading his arguments and the women were weeping when all of a sudden the sun that had been shining so brightly went under a cloud. The room darkened. The attorney's hands fumbled with his papers: he could no longer read. There was a violent clap of thunder; he stopped short and looked about him. He did not resume. Then the judges leaned their heads together for a moment and announced, "All are acquitted. All are acquitted." A man leaned over to Cyprine and said, "Go! The Blessed Virgin is protecting you."

And Cyprine thought to herself, "These gentlemen are just a little like us, after all. They are afraid of the thunder."

All the people began to clap ; they talked and made a great noise. And when they got outside and saw that the sky was clear again and that the storm had passed they said, "These sorceresses of Lourdes have won their case." But it was not said maliciously. All were astonished that the storm had come and gone so quickly ; they saw in it a sort of miracle. Even the judges and the lawyers came out on the steps in their court robes to see the clear sky and they also were astonished.

The accused women had a fine ending to their trip. The local editor put them in the newspaper and they went to see the Castle of Henry IV. And whenever they wanted to pay for any little thing people refused the money and said, "No ! No ! Just pray for us at the grotto !"

About five o'clock on the 15th of July they left for Lourdes and reached home shortly after midnight. M. Dufo and the Abbé Pomian were on the terrace and cried out, "What happened ?" and they called back, "We are acquitted."

But all the rest of Lourdes was asleep. It was the next day before their delight could be expressed. Cyprine met Bernadette who laughed and called to her, "I told you that you would be acquitted !" And that Bernadette should have said this was in itself a sort of miracle to Cyprine. "For," she said, "out of any three words, Bernadette usually kept back two."

The Abbé Pène placed himself at the entrance of the Barinque cobbler-shop, and there was much laughter and many compliments and congratulations. There were great comings and goings, and groups of women would get together and discuss it with great animation. Dr. Dozous went from door to door taking credit for the whole thing.

None of this made M. Jacomet happy. Especially as he had forty-two delinquents coming into court two days hence to answer to the accusations of trespass at the grotto.

*The Last Apparition at the Massabielle,
July 16, 1858*

July 16, 1858, was the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

In the late afternoon Bernadette was praying in the parish church. She had not been to the Massabielle since April the 7th, when it had been forbidden her to go. Besides, the grotto was completely boarded up and one could go only to the meadow on the opposite side of the river. But suddenly she felt the call of the grotto.

Night was falling and the long shadow of the mountain lay dark on the valley. Bernadette and her aunt and two others slipped swiftly down the hill and into the meadow where a group were praying silently and someone was kneeling who held a burning candle.

In that dim light Bernadette's face was visible. Suddenly her joined hands dropped with a little movement of surprise. They saw her smile. The river was so wide and the barriers so high! But at that moment she saw neither the Gave nor the barrier. She saw only her Lady. She was never to see her again.

The next day, July 17th, the day set for the trial of those who had been summoned, the court-room was full and even the approaches to the room were filled with townspeople. Some of the women knitted, and the atmosphere was that of a public spectacle. The Magistrate

was far from comfortable. He opened the court by ringing the bell and calling for the warrants.

"What is your name?" he would ask.

"Surely your Honor knows my name," the reply would come, "I am your next door neighbor!"

But such answers did not add to his leniency. Of the forty-two accused, forty received sentences. Two were acquitted: one was Mlle. Pailhasson. It was conceded that she might have acted without knowledge of what she was doing. She was only eight years of age.

The other was Croizine Bouhohorts, the woman who had taken her baby son to the grotto. She answered, "Here I am, Monsieur, present."

"You went to the grotto like the others?"

"Monsieur, I don't know what the others did, but I should like to tell you what I think about it."

Then the judge said to her, "Don't talk so much or I will have you arrested."

"Very well, Monsieur, I don't eat bread every day; in prison I will have it, and meat once a week!"

"We know enough," he interrupted attempting to dismiss her, "since you went to the grotto!"

"You have called me, Monsieur," she answered, "now let me say my say:

"I had a child who was very sick, and had been so for eighteen months; he had been in the death agony for six days. A neighbor even thought it was time to bury him! But a voice in my mind told me to take him to the grotto. There I bathed him in the water of the fountain. The women all said to me that he was dead; but he is cured!"

"Since," the judge said, "you have bathed the child in the water of the grotto, you are sentenced to a five francs fine, and the expenses of the court."

“Your Honor, judge me any way you like. But I have gone only on public property, where you are owner and I too. Formerly the pig of the rich man and the sow of the poor went to the Massabielle. We are all equal and — he was dead, and now he is cured !”

Then they did not make her pay anything, and nothing more was said.

On the 28th of July the Bishop of Tarbes wrote to the Minister of Worship :

"Today, as a concession to the requests which come to me from all sides, I believed that the time had come to take practical steps in this matter. I have named a commission to investigate and assemble all the elements necessary to make a decision. . ."

"The Trembler" had acted.

But M. Jacomet, true to the last to those instincts which accounted for his success in officialdom was in a quandary out of which only the Prefect could help him.

"You understand, M. le Préfet, that it is unfitting I should be taken unawares regarding the conduct I am to follow in case the members of this committee, vested with a certain official character, should want to descend to the grotto. Should an exception be made for them, or should the general law be applied to them too?"

In simple words, of which the Commissioner was rarely guilty, should he arrest the Bishop's committee?

That same day about four o'clock in the afternoon, M. Callet went to the grotto to issue a summons to some outsiders he had been told were praying there. Three girls, a nun, and a distinguished-looking woman dressed in mourning were kneeling at prayer. The nun was a Sister of Bon-Secours Saint-Antonin. The lady was the wife of Admiral Bruat and the three girls were her daughters, one of whom was later to become the Duchess of Padoue.

They had gone first to the home of Bernadette and visited with her, and arm in arm she had walked as far as the bridge with them toward the grotto.

The important thing was that Madame Bruat was the governess of the Prince Imperial. And the Court of Louis Napoleon was just at that time resting at nearby Biarritz.

July and August were the months in which many visitors came to the watering-places in the south of France. A great number of them came to Lourdes to see the grotto. All of them doubtless tried to see Bernadette ; all of the important ones must have succeeded.

The first week of August they found her removed from the room in the Petit-Fossés to the Mill Gros. This mill was situated on the Lapaca very near its entrance into the Gave. It has been destroyed since and a building housing a hotel called the Hôtel Richard is approximately on the site of it.

It is often stated that Bernadette and the Soubirous family made no advantage whatsoever from her connection with the apparitions. That is hardly exactly true. A few trips were given her, in order to get her away from the grotto. And her family were at last established in this mill, by the charity, it appears, of the Curé Peyramale and of the Bishop.

The Mill Gros was called in the dialect "Mouls deb Tabourire" and it was a poor mill in a bad state of repair. The family had never succeeded at milling yet they do seem to have made a moderate living at it this time. Perhaps the fame of Bernadette helped.

A visitor who went to seek her at the mill saw the parents there. They came out to speak to the visitor. François, he says, had a good face with a fresh ruddy complexion. He wore a blue beret, powdered with flour.

The mother had a child in her arms, another clung to her skirt. They seemed embarrassed by the visitors.

That many of the visitors were people of great importance was a fact calculated to embarrass simple peasants. Aside from the visit of the ladies of the court, Madame Bruat and her daughters, there were such men as M. Veuillot, editor of the *Paris Univers*; M. Dutirou, professor of Physics at the seminary at Auch, the Bishop of Montpellier, the Bishop of Soissons, the Bishop of Agen, the Abbé Barre, the Abbé Debelliès, and even the Archbishop of Auch.

Most of the ecclesiastics presumably saw Bernadette in the company of the Curé Peyramale or Abbé Pomian or the Abbé Serres. Sometimes she was chaperoned by members of her family or pious people who helped out. She still spoke French very badly and the visitors rarely knew the patois. One of them, at least, she must have seen at the house of M. Pailhasson, for she was there having lessons in writing that autumn. She was, to be sure, still going to the Hospice, but she was being taught very little. The Mother Superior did not like Bernadette; in testifying, Mademoiselle Tardhivail says that this nun "had a horror of the poor little girl."

The Mother Superior was not alone in her antagonism. The priest who interviewed her that day at M. Pailhasson's was far from gentle. He questioned her for an hour, asking her minutely about the feet and hands of the apparition. He insisted that the feet were not bare. She persisted, "I saw her feet; they were bare, and very pretty, with a rose on them."

"Then it was the devil that you saw," the priest told her sternly.

"The devil is not so pretty as that," she answered.

It is amusing to read the interviews that people held

with her. Many of them argued with her as though she were an elderly professor. Even so she often came out with the best of the argument because she would say, "I have seen."

"The Blessed Virgin was married to Saint Joseph," said one, "she must have had a ring."

"I did not see one," she answered. "She had no ring."

One priest had a very long interview with her. After contradicting her repeatedly and saying that he did not believe her, he said :

"You must be very proud of having seen the Blessed Virgin !"

"Why ? She just used me as her servant !"

He was baffled and speechless for a moment.

"Then you are the servant of the Blessed Virgin ?"

"Yes, M. l'Abbé."

"How much does she pay you in wages ?"

"Oh," she answered smiling, "we haven't decided on that yet !"

When she said that the Virgin's sash was blue, he began citing liturgical books arguing against blue.

"I saw that the sash was blue," she answered.

He got into a discussion with the Curé Peyramale and presently quoted material against his own argument, when Bernadette, whom the talkers had apparently forgotten, said simply, "Well those books don't seem to agree with the others !"

One pilgrim describes her as having quite an intelligent little face, with an air at once gracious and modest. He said that she was still just a little country girl, with a calico kerchief on her head.

Her breathing was very difficult and she was very frail and delicate. Father Peyramale saw her great fatigue. He tried to protect her from the incessant questioning

which took place several times a day. Nevertheless he often added to her burden by being very harsh with her. On one occasion a guest remained behind and remonstrated with him. "If I treat her thus," said the Curé Peyramale, "it is to keep her from pride and vanity."

One and all tried on leaving to coax her to part with the rosary which she had used at the grotto. They offered her jeweled ones "in exchange for prayers," and then slyly suggested that she give them hers. But this she always declined.

Many years later a priest, a former pilgrim, stated that he had received this rosary from Bernadette. As she lay dying someone told her of it. "I did not give the rosary away which I used during the apparitions. I refused to exchange it for beads decorated with gold, which an archbishop offered me at the Curé's. One day, after having said that, I put it back in my pocket, but in the evening I couldn't find it any more, neither in the pocket, nor in the house, in spite of all my seeking, which caused me great grief. If someone maintains that he has it, then it is because he stole it from me : I never wanted to give it to anyone." The date of her loss is not known. She had it still on September 9th when a close relative of the Pope asked her for it and for her autograph for the Pope.

Frère Léobard, whose school was being decimated by the "infinity of visionaries," felt that the simplicity of Bernadette was assumed. "If one observes more, one discovers, on the contrary, much trickery in her. . . I asked myself, more than once . . . if she is not a clever actress rather than a candid mystic."

She was always to be the object of opposing opinions.

On September 8th, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, Bernadette was received into the Society of the Daughters of Mary. Abbé Sempé, who was later to be-

come the Superior of the Fathers of Lourdes, admitted her. He was seeing her for the first time and he was troubled by her gaiety !

September saw great groups of visitors at the grotto, both peasants on pilgrimages and more important people. The Abbé Pomian seems to have conducted many people toward the grotto but to have himself always stopped at the bridge. Once a group of some six visiting priests accompanied by laymen went to the grotto, and after a picnic supper brought from the hotel they scaled the barrier and chanted a chorus of litanies with such vigor that they could be heard five or six hundred metres away on the road to Pau.

Sometimes however, people stopped at the grotto to scoff. Dr. de Paul, Secretary of the Academy of Medicine in Paris, stopped by, and after observing for a while said that he had not believed it possible to find a town of such idiocy in all of France. Nevertheless, Jacomet says with despair, "It is forbidden to doubt." So strong was the feeling among the people.

Then on October 5th, the incredible thing happened. Toward three o'clock in the afternoon the drummer and the public herald, appropriately uniformed and gloved, marched through the town. First the drummer would beat a rapid ruffle and then the crier would read. It was the Mayor's proclamation !

"Inhabitants of Lourdes, you were awaiting with great impatience the moment when the entrance of the Grotto would be made free. This moment has come . . . and in conformity with the instruction addressed to us, the decree of June 8th is repealed.

"From this day on, access to the Grotto is permitted"
(Signed) "The Mayor, LACADÉ."

The proclamation was made by order of the Emperor.

The news ran through the town like an electric spark. The people poured out into the streets. They were wildly elated; their faces radiant. They stopped and congratulated each other, and told the good news over and over again. They said, "The victory is ours, and it was time!"

For a moment they thought of illuminating the town but instead they ran to get pitchers and jars and bottles and "rich and poor, men and women, old and young and children, all went down to the Massabielle" to get water.

They saw Latapie, the road-mender, taking a cart and they asked him where he was going and when they learned that he was going down to get the barrier they went down with him. Stone-cutters joined the crowd. With powerful arms they turned over the famous sign-post and detached the planks of the barrier with resounding blows of their axes and hammers. And they lugged the planks back up the steep path and heaped them on the cart.

The people prayed continually. Before night had fallen all the inhabitants of Lourdes had come to drink water at the miraculous spring. They kissed the ground and raised their eyes to the grotto, and some people with strong clear voices recited the rosary there and the kneeling crowd responded.

Père Sempé tells how in the month of March, 1858, Bishop Laurence had laughed, and others with him, at the apparitions of Bernadette. On November 17th a commission of eight priests appointed by him gathered to record her answers to questions about the apparitions. M. Fourcade was the secretary. Lamole, Barradère, No-

garo, Burosse, Peyramale the curé, and his two vicars, Pomian and Pène, formed the commission.

Toward eleven in the morning the Bishop's commissioners decided to go at once to the grotto in order to avoid the crowd and to send for Bernadette to meet them there. They had yet to reckon with the crowds of Lourdes. Hardly had the commissioners started to the grotto when the populace began to stir, and at least four hundred people were there as quickly as they were.

Presently Bernadette arrived. The people stepped aside to open a way for her and she presented herself with both modesty and assurance. The commission asked her many questions which she answered with the same calm and the same deliberation as if she had been alone. People knelt on the rocks and about the grotto and prayed. Across the river in the meadow opposite a few skeptics were assembled.

Many witnesses were examined at this time, as to whether the existence of the spring had been known before the apparitions or not. After some time the members of the commission disbanded for an intermission and afterwards they reassembled in the sacristy of the parish church. Bernadette was again called and again gave accounts of the apparitions as she had done so many times before.

The commission met intermittently for four years. Detailed and exhaustive accounts were heard from many witnesses. It is from the material thus gathered that the work of Père Cros was taken and it was mainly from such excerpts as he made of these proceedings that this account so far has been made.

21

The life of the Soubirous at the Mill Gros was certainly infinitely better than life at Le Cachot. Bernadette was at school at the Hospice again, but the nuns were interested mainly in having her testify about the apparitions.

One of the men in the village undertook to teach her to write, another to teach her to speak French. She herself said that she had a poor memory. "You would have less trouble in driving the book into my head," she said, "than in trying to make me remember the lesson." She did learn very little. But between her illnesses and the constant interruptions, it is difficult to see how she could have learned much. She was allowed now occasionally to go to the grotto and she always washed her face and eyes after praying. Someone asked her why she washed her eyes with the water. "To make me learn to read," she answered.

Pilgrims continued to come. They went to the grotto and took stones or moss, or pieces of the rosebush, and they wanted the water in which Bernadette had washed her face. Most of them were pious, but some were like the four rollicking young men who came on horseback and who determined to ask Bernadette if the Virgin's eyes were red or green.

"Take care, sirs," said Mademoiselle Lacrampe, who overheard them, "if you go there you will return with very different ideas." Although they did not come back converted, they did nevertheless come back subdued. "This girl is incapable of lying," they exclaimed.

On All Saints Day, November 1st, she was again in

Cauterets. A pilgrim tells of seeing her take Communion. The demands for testimony concerning the apparitions followed her there. "She noted these marks of esteem with sorrow and avoided these visits as much as she was able." She could not walk outside without people following her so she went early to Mass, and on her return played with the little children of the house, who remained inside.

Later in November she was back in Lourdes where Monsieur Azun was beginning to collect material for a book about her, which was to be published in June 1860. There had been as yet only a small unauthorized pamphlet under the title "*Vision de Lourdes*"; the new book was to be called "*La Grotte des Pyrénées, ou la manifestation de la Sainte Vierge à la Grotte de Lourdes*." Monsieur Azun had many interviews with Bernadette at her home where he saw her helping her mother with the housework and taking care of the younger children (on September the 10th, 1859, a baby brother had been born who was named Bernard-Pierre).

Bernadette wore, he said, a dress of plain cotton, an apron of the same material, and quite a large kerchief around her neck. Her head was covered with a cotton kerchief knotted under her chin. She wore shoes and woolen stockings.

He describes her room, too. Besides some poor pieces of furniture there was also a small shrine where flowers and medals and saintly objects gave a touch of brightness. In the center of the little shrine was a statue of the Blessed Virgin.

Bernadette's godmother says that soon after the apparitions she decided that she wanted to become a nun. She wanted to become a Carmelite but was given to understand that her health would not permit her to enter

this order and she was also told that she was not strong enough to enter a nursing order. Abbé Pomian says that she wanted to be a "Sister of the Cross." Sisters of various orders came to ask her to join them, much to the scandal of the Sisters at the Hospice who had their own ideas. There was even one who took off her head-dress to try it on Bernadette, but instead of attracting her it aroused aversion in her, according to the Sisters of the Hospice. One thing is certain, she did not at that time want to become one of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers which was the organization to which the Sisters at the Hospice belonged.

In January, 1860, Bernadette was sixteen ; toward the middle of July of that year, Curé Peyramale decided that the life at her home favored neither her physical nor her spiritual growth and she was removed to the Hospice to the care of the Sisters.

It is with regret that one finishes this period of her life. For, interrupted as it continually was by the stream of visitors, it was still peaceful compared to what it was to become ; and she was at least still surrounded by her family to which she was so deeply attached.

PART III
THE CONVENT

1

Dr. Dozous did not like Mother Alexandrine Roques, the sister superior at the Hospice. He was much angered by this change. "Bernadette," he said, "is confided to bad hands." Certainly from the point of view of her health he is right. The quiet at the Hospice was mythical, but she was at least given a small room and treated partly as a boarder. This was probably a charity of Curé Peyramale's.

She helped in the kitchens and the workroom and in the infirmary. Sometimes she played with the girls, or perhaps led the younger girls in their dances. Sometimes she played little jokes on the other girls; but her general way of life was very sedate and unchildlike.

In November 1861, Sister Victorine was charged with watching over Bernadette. Later she testified to Bernadette's modesty and described her temptations. Princes, prelates, wise men, ladies of the upper society and enthusiastic crowds all combined to spoil her if they could. She was venerated as a saint. Even priests knelt before her and asked for her blessing. She avoided all such scenes whenever it was possible. "I do not know how to bless," she would say. Or, when they asked her to touch their rosaries, "It is forbidden."

"By some gift of God," says Sister Victorine, "her vanity was inaccessible."

One little human weakness she had for a time. Under the influence of another school girl she developed a tendency to coquettishness. One day Sister Victorine surprised her as she was trying to enlarge her tunic to give it the appearance of a crinoline. She lived, after all, in the time of the Empress Eugénie. Another time Sister Victorine saw her putting pieces of wood, like stays, in her corsets. But "this fever passed." Sometimes, also, she was a bit obstinate. Once she refused to take off her Sunday dress when told to. Another day she insisted on going to see her father and did not give in until after a long argument. And once she refused to dress her best to have her portrait taken. She was always being photographed in her peasant's dress, as she had been when she had seen the apparitions, posed as though in prayer. From the great number of pictures extant and the length of time one had to sit in the 1860's in order to be photographed that must have been a misery to her. When she was older she revolted.

But the nuns observed, they said, that whenever she was more than usually rebellious her behavior was followed by pain of some sort. On these occasions someone would say, "She will soon be ill." And they concluded that God made her want to expiate her faults as soon as possible.

All in all they thought her behavior adequate for a future saint.

No matter what Bernadette may have been doing around the Hospice the bell would ring : there were visitors to see Bernadette and to ask over and over for details of the apparitions. Thanks to the lessons in French she was shortly able to answer without an interpreter.

Everyone who interviewed her was very curious about the "three secrets" which she had said her apparition told

her. She was asked over and over again about them, and each time she refused to tell. Then invariably would come the question, "Would you tell your secrets to the Pope?"

"No."

"But the Pope has the power of Jesus Christ."

"The Pope," she would answer, "is very powerful on earth — but the Blessed Virgin is powerful in Heaven."

Those three secrets were her one reticence: those and a prayer that the apparition had taught her. In the life of pitiless and pitiable publicity that she had to live she had at least this one little spot from which the curious were excluded.

All these interviews fatigued her unmercifully, and fatigue made her chest pains worse. One day as Sister Victorine was taking her to the parlor, Bernadette stopped and put her head against the unopened door and wept.

"Courage," said Sister Victorine, "those are very big tears." She dried her eyes and entered and went through with the interview.

Sick people came there, intent on being touched by her, and usually, by some device or other, managed it. Curé Peyramale tried to lessen all of this but the Sisters would "be good enough just this once!"

One day in 1862 Bernadette's condition was so critical that she was thought to be dying. She was given the Last Sacraments. When this news went through the town everyone was greatly excited. A woman who wished to see a friend of hers converted went to the Hospice to find out if it were possible to have an interview with Bernadette.* She had of course been forbidden to

* *Bernadette of Lourdes*, R. M. Marie-Thérèse Bordenave, Nevers, France, 1933, p. 158.

see visitors, "but the dear Sisters did not have the heart to turn me away," the woman writes. Just as they reached the bedside Bernadette was seized with a dreadful pain. Two Sisters were supporting her and she had the appearance of being in the act of dying. As soon as she was a little recovered the visitor went to the bed and kissed her, weeping violently. Finally Bernadette turned her head and said, "Oh Madame, please get up and stop crying; I cannot bear to see you so distressed." *

In her attacks of pain and hemorrhage she would cry, "Open my chest and let me breathe." But she was never impatient or cross and she gave whatever interviews the Sisters asked of her.

On January 18, 1862, the Bishop had issued a decree: "We declare that Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, did in reality appear to Bernadette Soubirous on February 11, 1858, and on certain subsequent occasions, to the number of eighteen in all, in the Grotto of Massabielle, near the town of Lourdes . . . and that the faithful are justified in believing it certain."

When it was decided in 1863 to put a statue of Bernadette's Lady in the niche, Fabisch, a sculptor highly thought of in that period, was commissioned to make it. He was very enthusiastic and optimistic. He felt that he could make one so perfect that Bernadette seeing it would cry out, "It is she!" But in spite of all her efforts to assist him she was never able to make him visualize her apparition. She did not like his statue. When they asked her if she was satisfied with it she responded with energy, "No, not at all." When the time to install it came Bernadette was ill again; too ill to attend. The Curé Peyramale was too ill to be there also. But there were official processions and a great fête.

* Bordenave, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

In the Hospice there is still a little chapel where she worshipped and on the altar is the same statue of the Virgin of which she was fond. It is a very lovely and altogether human looking little statue of painted wood or plaster, very Spanish-looking.

Bernadette was not given to long periods of meditation and prayer. The Sisters used to say to her, "At your age you should meditate a little." But she would reply, "I don't know how to meditate."

Sometimes there would be just a little ordinary happiness in Bernadette's life. In April, 1863, Romaine Poueyto, her friend, was to be married. It was the morning of the wedding and a little mist made it seem that the party should have umbrellas. So Romaine ran to the Sisters to borrow three large blue ones that they had. She was dressed for her wedding. As a concession to mourning in the family, her dress was dark blue, her shawl black, but she had a kerchief and scarf of white silk, tied with a rose-colored ribbon.

When she asked Sister Aurélie for the umbrellas, she asked also to see Bernadette. Bernadette was propped up in bed with two great pillows, so that her breath might come more easily. They talked a moment. Then Bernadette gave her her hand. "Pray for me," she said. "I hope that you will be very happy."

There was unhappiness for her also, at this period. In September, Jean, a baby born to her mother on February 4th, died. He had never been a strong baby in all of his seven months of life.

The last of September, 1863, Monseigneur Forcade, Bishop of Nevers, where the motherhouse of the Sisters

of the Hospice was located, came to visit the Hospice in Lourdes. These Sisters lived under his jurisdiction. On his trip of inspection he found Bernadette cleaning vegetables in the kitchen. That evening he sent for her to come to his office. He questioned her awhile on the apparitions.

"And now, my dear child," he said, "what are you going to become?"

"Why, nothing," she answered.

"Nothing? But one has to do something in this world."

"Well I am here with the Sisters!"

But he showed her why she might not always stay with the Sisters unless she became one of them. As an alternative he showed her the outside world. Perhaps she wished that?

Bernadette doubtless knew how helpless she would be in the outside world. "Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed.

But she had no dowry to bring the convent.

The Bishop promised none would be asked of her.

"But I know nothing. I am good at nothing."

"Come, come! I saw you this morning grating carrots."

In the end she was left to think it over and make her choice: the outside, without protection, or the convent. She was nearly twenty.

It was some time later that fall of 1863 that she asked the superior to tell Bishop Forcade that she would like to become a postulant at the convent at Saint-Gildard at Nevers.

But on the day set for her departure she was very ill again and for the next two years she was alternately a bit better or much worse and she remained at Lourdes.

Bernadette was twenty-one years old in 1865 but it was said of her that she still looked exactly as she had at fourteen. This is certainly not borne out by her pictures. Her face was maturing with great beauty, but it was not the conventional beauty of the court of Eugénie. Her dark eyes look out under heavy brows that nearly meet over a straight well-shaped nose ; her mouth is large and mobile ; her hair black and very neatly parted. There is great candor in her face and certainly no vanity. Nor is there, strangely enough, any evidence of the malady from which she and her whole family evidently suffered.

Early in 1865, her ten-year-old brother Justin died. There is no record of what the Soubirous children died nor their mother later. They were certainly all exposed continually to Bernadette's tuberculosis which, although it was never called that during her life-time was a well-known disease in her century. In her case it was called asthma and inflammation of the lungs, but for some reason the truth seems to have been avoided.

The Mother Superior still worried needlessly about Bernadette's humility. Many young priests came to interview Bernadette but the Mother Superior interviewed the young priests before she let them talk to her. "No eulogies, I beg of you ; not too obvious admiration. It was necessary for me last week to intervene to stop the devotion of a priest who placed in the hand of this child his breviary and his rosary. I believe, God pardon me ! that he was asking her to bless them."

During the interview the Mother Superior evidently

felt that they were showing too much admiration in spite of her warning and turning to them she said, "Come, my Fathers, let me complete your information by telling you what the Blessed Virgin has not yet done for Bernadette; it is to make her completely good! With all of these gracious favors, she is preparing herself for Purgatory."

There were accounts also of how one group of pilgrims after another waited under the cloister until each should have finished its interview.

Some time later in the year, possibly in mid-summer, the Sisters at the order's house at Pau wanted to see Bernadette. Unfortunately she was recognized as she entered the convent and in a moment the place was besieged. The courtyard was filled with mothers who wanted her to touch their children. With the aid of the police the Sisters got some order and Bernadette walked around touching the children in order to disperse the crowd. She was greatly fatigued but, unfortunately, it was necessary, in order to content the Sisters of Olorn, to take her there also. All the pupils at Saint-Angèle's Convent were gathered when Bernadette entered dressed in a peasant costume such as she wore when she saw the apparitions. She seated herself in a chair on a platform and made the sign of the cross telling those gathered there they must always make it so for it was thus the Blessed Virgin had made it when she first appeared to her. Then she recited the rosary for them.

Unfortunately on leaving the convent at Olorn she was again recognized and the women of this town also besieged her. It was on her return to Lourdes from this trip that she again nearly died. In October she was once more out of danger.

Mother Superior Alexandrine was not very happy over

the way things were going. Bernadette, she says in a letter, is anxious now to go to Nevers but,* "I fear it may yet be put off if the Bishop of Tarbes insists on her remaining a little longer for the good of the Grotto. Pray God, dear Mother, that this may not happen, if such be His holy will, so that the poor child may be sheltered from the perils of self-esteem and from the advances of certain religious orders, which make overtures to her, even in our presence."

In April of 1866, the crypt of a chapel at the Massabielle was completed and Whitmonday, May 21, was fixed for the installation.

Hippolyte Duran, well known for his work in church architecture, had been chosen as the architect of the chapel. He chose to work in a medieval fashion well suited to the subject and to the location, which was to be on top of the rock. The crypt or supporting part of the chapel was completed. Five altars were to be consecrated in it.

The morning of the day of dedication was beautiful and all of the roads were covered by pilgrims. Triumphant arches had been erected on the main streets and all the houses were decorated with wreaths and with the oriflamme.

A procession of three hundred priests started from the parish church. When Bishop Laurence who was to consecrate the altars appeared on the heights of the Massabielle, the students and faculty of the Petit-Séminaire of Saint-Pé who were massed across the river intoned a hymn. Around the grotto on the cliff and all along the stream the multitudes crowded.

What had once been the field around the Savy Mill

* Bordenave, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

had become an esplanade and on a large altar erected there pontifical Mass began. But a great storm was rising in the west, so that the sermon could not be heard. Then after the prayers, the people acclaimed Our Lady of Lourdes and Pope Pius IX, and they cried "Long live the Bishop ! Long live the Curé of Lourdes !"

Then the storm passed and the light of the setting sun lit up the snowy tops of the surrounding mountains.

Bernadette was given no formal place in the procession. She was there in the midst of the delegation of the Daughters of Mary hidden a bit by the veil such as they all wear. But if the clergy seems to have been indifferent to her presence, the people were not. "Where is our little Saint ?", they cried. They discovered her. "The Saint ! Here is the Saint." They crowded around her, they kissed her, and began to cut off pieces of her veil, and even clipped her hair for souvenirs. They would have torn her clothing off but finally the nuns surrounded her while she, with frank disgust, exclaimed, "What stupid people ! They are mad ! What bores they are to want to kiss me !" Finally she was extricated from the crowd and taken back to the Hospice.

Night came. The town was illuminated. And the crowds that had jammed the Massabielle turned toward the Hospice. They closed the gates but the crowd clamored at the wall. They wanted to catch a glimpse of Bernadette. Finally in order to quiet the crowd that grew greater and more unruly every moment, the Sisters asked her to walk with one of them up and down behind the grille of the court in full sight. She consented but she was terribly disturbed by it. Walking there while the mob of faithful admirers cheered, she muttered angrily to the Sisters, "You show me as though I were something strange ; as though I were a curious animal."

Perhaps from this point on she saw that the convent was the only place for her, for the Sisters of Nevers had promised to protect her from the curious and let her live a life of quiet and peace inside their walls.

3

Bernadette was to leave Lourdes on July 4, 1866. On the night of the 3rd her mother and father, her god-mother and some others went up to the Hospice to see her. Her mother was quite ill, but not too ill to go there that night. Justine Laguës, daughter of her old nurse, asked her if it were not painful for her to leave Lourdes but she answered, "I am very glad to leave."

The next day very early two nuns accompanied her to the grotto to say goodbye to it. She knelt there to pray. It was time finally for her to go. One of the nuns touched her arm, but she burst into tears and flung herself on the ground.

"Oh, Mother, my Mother, how can I leave you." She tried to pray again, but despair left her prostrate with the rosary hanging limp from her hands. The Sisters thought it wise to end the scene but she begged, "Oh let me stay! It's for the last time. Oh I beg, dear Sisters, allow me a moment longer."

Again and again she delayed going until at last controlling herself she dried her eyes, and, looking back once at the grotto, left it to go to the mill.

In the kitchen of the mill the whole family was gathered in wretched silence : her mother, ill, her father to whom she was so greatly devoted, her sisters and brothers whom death had so recently visited. Suddenly she could bear it no longer and with a last despairing clasp she kissed them all as the wheels of the carriage sounded on the pavement of the court.

Her godmother and her younger sister Toinette-Marie, who had been with her at the first apparition, went with her as far as Tarbes. There they said goodbye to her and with Mother Superior Alexandrine Roque and possibly Sister Victorine, her guardian, she went on her way to the Convent of Saint-Gildard at Nevers.

With two brief exceptions she was never to see any of her family again, and only death was to separate her from the order of nuns into which she had fled for protection.

Nevers, where Bernadette was to spend the rest of her life, is the chief town in the department of the Nièvre, situated at the meeting-place of the rivers Loire and Nièvre. The country is not mountainous as is the Lourdes country, but gentle and rolling.

The architecture of Nevers is very mixed. An ancient wall which goes back to the 12th century can still be traced and there is one particularly fine old church, St. Etienne, which Bernadette must have known. The cathedral which she must have known even better is somewhat commonplace. The town in general does not give any impression of medievalism. Most of its architecture and streets and squares suggest the Napoleons.

Out beyond the Place Carnot and the heavily-shaded public park lies the Convent of Saint-Gildard. It is the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction. The order which was founded in 1680 has an honorable history of nursing service and asceticism. During the French Revolution many of the Sisters were cast into prison and for some, reprieve came only after they were on the fatal tumbril which was to bear them to the scaffold. At the time of the suppression, in 1903, more than a hundred houses of the congregation were dis-

banded, but at the time of which we write it was a strong and vigorous order.

Saint-Gildard itself is a collection of somewhat commonplace tan buildings, built around 1856. It stands on the site of the ruins of an ancient priory of the same name. Back of the convent the hillside slopes away abruptly and has been leveled into garden terraces held back by retaining walls and connected by steep ramps and stairways. At present, railways and various manufacturing plants lie at the foot of this hill, but in 1866 they did not exist and the convent looked out onto the pretty French countryside of the valley.

The spiritual state on which the order lays the greatest stress is humility and the acceptance of pain and humiliation. It is impossible to understand the life of Bernadette at the convent until this fact is accepted.

The Mother Superior at Nevers, Mother Joséphine Imbert, and her assistant, Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, were to play a great part in the life of Bernadette. Mother Joséphine Imbert has been described as endowed with a man's intelligence and a woman's heart. She was a woman of uncommon energy but very bad health.

Marie-Thérèse Vauzou was born near Collonges in 1825 and died at Lourdes in 1907. She was novice mistress at Nevers when Bernadette came and was at that time forty-one years of age. Her manner was authoritative and aloof. The illness of Mother Joséphine made Mother Marie-Thérèse in effect the acting superior of the institution the greater part of the time. It is said of her that she had "a veritable passion for the fashioning of souls."

When it became known that Bernadette was actually about to become a member of the order there was great rejoicing. The nuns felt that her presence would cover

the order with renown. They knew that people would be attracted by her presence and that the spiritual experience of which she had been a part would mean everything to the convent. But on the approach of Bernadette, Mother Joséphine called her council together and a policy was decided on for the treatment of her. The conclusion was apparently reached that she should be treated just as everyone else — which was what Bernadette most hoped for. But in reality their decision was to treat her with even more severity in order to safeguard the humility of this young girl who had had so much public praise and attention.

At half past ten at night, Saturday, July 9th, 1866, Bernadette and the two nuns escorting her reached Saint-Gildard. The waiting room has, in all probability, not changed a great deal, except that now it is dominated by a life-sized statue of Bernadette. When Bernadette first came to Nevers there was doubtless the same high ceiling and high, narrow windows, and the same light oak woodwork. Possibly the same type of golden oak chairs with little tidies on their backs stood in the same straight rows around the room.

There are several accounts of her first interview with Mother Joséphine, none of which, however, is very much to be relied upon. Bernadette, small and lonely, seems to have waited there in her Pyrenean costume with the hood-shaped capulet. Presently Mother Joséphine entered,* gave an uninterested glance at the girl and asked, as though she had never heard of her :

“You are the postulant from Lourdes ?”

“Yes, my Mother.”

* J. B. Estrade, *Appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Grotto of Lourdes*, London, 1912, p. 253.

"What is your name?"

"Bernadette Soubirous."

"What can you do?"

"Nothing very much, Mother."

"Who recommended you to us?"

"The Bishop of Nevers."

"Well he has sent us many others. Tomorrow morning if you are not too tired you will go to the kitchen where you will help the lay Sister to wash up."

According to the house records the reception was not so cold, "At last our desires are fulfilled! Bernadette is one of us!"

All day Sunday Bernadette wept with homesickness. The Sisters cheered her by saying that it was the mark of a true vocation. But she always remembered her unhappiness. All her later life at the convent she went out of the way to cheer up and comfort the young girls who were just entering. "Have you had a good cry for your mother yet?" she would say when they were presented to her. She was so very homesick in the beginning that when she received a letter from home, she waited until she was alone to open it, because she felt incapable of reading it without crying her eyes out. But she wrote cheerful and enthusiastic letters back to the Sisters at Lourdes and she apparently kept her serenity when she was being observed.

On July 29, 1866, the Feast of St. Martha, she took off her peasant dress and put on the habit of the Sisters of Charity and took the name of Sister Marie-Bernard. Three weeks was a short time for a postulancy but the long years of observation of her at Lourdes was considered to have replaced it.

Shortly after this the Mother Superior assembled the entire convent and the postulants together and there she

had Bernadette tell the story of the apparitions. It was her intention to have it told once and for all and never again alluded to.

Bernadette stood very quietly, with her hands in her sleeves as the rule of the convent is. Her story was clear and precise, brief, bare of effusion, impersonal. She did not once raise her voice or become excited, there was neither pride nor personal satisfaction in her manner nor the least trace of either enthusiasm or exaltation.

When she had finished her recital and answered questions briefly, Mother Marie-Thérèse said : * "Our dear Sister Marie-Bernard has had the privilege of seeing the Blessed Virgin and speaking to her ; but now she has gone back into the shadows, and her exterior rôle is finished. Now she has only to practice the religious life as we do. Leave her in peace. Never speak to her again of the apparitions."

This must have been entirely acceptable to Bernadette for she herself said, "I came here to hide myself."

It is repeatedly stated in the literature of Nevers that this attitude was maintained. To be sure books written about her might not be read in front of her, sermons might not be preached about her in her presence (although even that once happened), nor during her lifetime was any replica of the statue of "Our Lady of Lourdes" ever displayed at Saint-Gildard. But the statement that there was kept any vow of silence regarding the apparitions is not borne out by fact. "More than once," Mother Marie-Thérèse herself brought groups of young novices to Bernadette to hear the story. She then reminded them that they were not to speak of it again and usually dismissed Bernadette brusquely. She

* *Sainte Bernadette, Souvenirs Inédits*, Chanoine E. Guynot, Paris, 1937, p. 34.

was repeatedly called to the parlor to answer questions for prominent people.

Bishop Forcade, the Bishop of Nevers, wrote, "One must have but a slight acquaintance with human nature, and especially with feminine instincts to be able to regard this reticence (of the convent in regard to the apparitions) as without significance. I have no scruple in describing it as nothing less than heroic." And so it would have been.

In the latter part of October of that year (1866) Bernadette was taken with violent coughing and hemorrhages of the lungs and grew rapidly worse. Mother Marie-Thérèse, who had a gift for dramatic expression, exclaimed, "We are not worthy of possessing her! We must take Heaven by storm." So prayers were redoubled and more candles burned before the image of the Blessed Virgin at the novitiate. On October the 25th, the Last Sacraments were given her. But the nuns were unhappy to think that she should die without taking the vows that would make her a member of the congregation. Normally she would have had to wait another year in the novitiate, but between nine and ten at night Bishop Forcade of Nevers was told that Bernadette was dying and he consented to her being received into the congregation. The Bishop found Bernadette gasping for breath and he himself pronounced the formula of the vows to which she answered, "So be it."

In the *Annals of the Community* it is stated that she took the veil and the crucifix given her and said,* "I have them! They belong to me! No one will be able to take them from me. I am a part of the congregation. They will never be able to dismiss me!"

* Des Rocheres, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

However, as much as they may have frightened the nuns, these attacks were no new thing to Bernadette. After them she apparently often felt better. This time she suddenly felt revived and said to Mother Joséphine who was at her bedside, "You had me make my profession because you believed that I would die this night, but I will not die tonight."

"What!" Mother Joséphine exclaimed. "You knew that you were not going to die tonight, and yet you did not say so? And you caused Monseigneur to come at such an unreasonable hour? You are just a little fool! I declare to you that if you are not dead tomorrow morning I will take away from you the veil which has just been given you, and I will send you back to the novitiate, with the veil of a simple novice."

To which Bernadette replied calmly, "As you wish, my Mother."

Apologists for the Mother Superior sometimes omit this incident, sometimes say that the story is apocryphal; sometimes that Mother Joséphine was busy at her appointed task of developing humility. We use the story as written by Bishop Forcade, who was there that night, and accepted by Père Cros.*

It is very difficult for the biographer to evaluate Bernadette's treatment by these nuns. At the time at which she lived, extreme suffering was an essential part of sainthood in the eyes of the public. Possibly the descriptions of her "perpetual martyrdom" at the hands of her superiors are exaggerated. Some nuns in later testimony say so; some say not. The best that can be done is to evaluate the evidence as given by the nuns themselves.†

* Cros, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 208.

† The material used in the discussion of Bernadette's life in the convent has been compiled chiefly from sources supplied by the Sisters of Nevers.

Jean des Rocheres says that * "They gave themselves up to the work of clearing up a garden of lilies in full bloom." And he adds that, "The life of Bernadette at Nevers was truly a long martyrdom ; martyrdom of her candor, martyrdom of her weak constitution, and especially the martyrdom of the misunderstanding of others."

Toward the end of her life Mother Marie-Thérèse was herself in some doubt as to her own wisdom.† She was herself "astonished at her (own) hardness and even uneasy about it." It is stated frankly that she always remained ignorant of the true qualities of Bernadette. Social distinction and polish were very valuable qualities to Mother Marie-Thérèse and these Bernadette had yet to acquire. Although she was later described as having the manner and simplicity of a great lady she was continually assured of her insignificance and insubordination and of her fault of pride, none of which could have been very helpful in the development of poise and polish. One of the other young nuns remembers herself as saying, "What a mercy I am not Bernadette."

Some of the nuns did not approve of the treatment of Bernadette. Although they were not in positions to change the policy of the institution toward her, they did secretly encourage and console her. Mother Nathalie Portal was one of these. She was second assistant to the Superior General ; and Mother Eléonore Cassagnes, the Secretary General, was her friend for twelve years and constituted one of the bright spots in her painful existence.

La Physionomie d'une Voyante by Jean des Rocheres (Editions du Foyer) 1934 ; *Sainte Bernadette, Souvenirs Inédits* by Chanoine E. Guynot (Editions Spes, Paris) 1937. Wherever Père Cros' *Histoire de Notre Dame de Lourdes* has disagreed with the other evidence his opinion has been accepted as having been formed from material taken under oath.

* *La Physionomie d'une Voyante*, Jean des Rocheres, Paris, 1934, p. 210.

† Bordenave, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

There is certainly little question that every effort was made to humble Bernadette. But how much she suffered is hard to say. From her diary many excerpts are printed that show intense suffering but they are often worded in the accepted manner of the place and period and are a bit hard to judge.

"Oh Jesus! Give me, I implore Thee, the bread of patience to support the grief that tortures my heart. Thy will is to crucify me . . . Fiat!" *

"Yes I will bear the cross concealed within my heart with courage and generosity. . . Henceforth the more I am crucified, the more I will rejoice!" †

One of the quotations sounds much less stereotyped: "When I suffer from the contempt of my superiors or my companions, when I bleed from the humiliations that they inflict upon me, I must never fail immediately to offer thanks to our Lord." ‡

But on the surface she was evidently quite self-possessed and when she was asked if Mother Marie-Thérèse's treatment distressed her she answered that the novice-mistress knew what she was about: and that she had lots of pride, but that now she would try to cure herself of it.

Her mother, who had been ill when Bernadette left Lourdes, had slowly declined and by the early part of December was dying. The Abbé Pomian had administered the Last Sacraments.

On December 8, 1866, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, vespers were sung in the chapel of the crypt at Lourdes for the first time. On her way to chapel Sis-

* Bordenave, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

† *Ibid.*, p. 218.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

ter Victorine stopped in to speak to Louise of Bernadette and to promise to write to her. When she came out of the vesper service she heard the news of Louise Soubirous' death.

The following August, 1867, Father Peyramale and Bishop Laurence bought and deeded to François Soubirous the Lacadé Mill situated on the Lapaca not far from the Boly Mill where Bernadette was born.

The Lacadé Mill is the one now known as the *Maison Paternelle*. In it now is a collection of various objects that have belonged to the family, including furniture and a collection of photographs. Bernadette, of course, had never lived at that house.

Her father had not become, by the mere acquisition of a mill, a good business man but the family was never again to know real want. As the years passed he came to venerate Bernadette as a saint and was seen kneeling before her picture in prayer. When on March 4, 1871, he died, at the age of 61, he left Bernadette the nominal head of her family of younger brothers and sisters.*

* Louise and François Soubirous are buried in the old cemetery of Lourdes in the family vault.

The Sisters of Nevers were not mistaken as to what they considered would be the glory shed by Bernadette on the convent : many girls selected this order because Bernadette had done so. Usually their first act on entering was to have Bernadette pointed out to them. Occasionally, though, they wanted to guess which one she was ; they were convinced that they could detect her by the great spiritual beauty of her countenance.

In the middle of May 1867, a young girl, later Sister Bernard * Dalias, entered the convent. She was accompanied by Mother Bernard who, while at Lectoure, which is not far from Lourdes, had seen and admired Bernadette. A few days after her entrance the new postulant went up to Mother Bernard as she was standing talking to some other young Sisters in the cloister of the novitiate. She had not yet been able to distinguish Bernadette and she was disappointed and a bit piqued. Standing next to Mother Bernard was a very tiny sister, a head shorter than all the others. She was charming, even perhaps pretty, perhaps even the prettiest in the group. The future Sister Bernard Dalias turned to Mother Bernard and exclaimed, "It is really strange ! I have been here three days and I haven't yet been able to recognize Bernadette."

"Bernadette !" exclaimed Mother Bernard. "Why this is she !"

Bernard looked at Bernadette and exclaimed, "That ?"

* It is not uncommon for Catholic nuns to bear the masculine form of the name.

But Bernadette stretched out her hand to Bernard and answered laughingly, "But yes, Mademoiselle, no one but that!" And, in spite of the apparent snub in the word *that*, the friendship between the two girls was never thereafter disturbed. Later when Sister Bernard Dalias was given the veil she asked Bernadette to arrange it for her. "I wouldn't do it for anyone else," she said, "but since it is for a Bernard, yes." There was usually a tone of loving banter in their words for each other. It is stated by writers that Bernadette had no intimate or confidential friends; that they were not encouraged in the convent, where an effort was made to keep friendships very general. Certainly Sister Bernard Dalias seems to have come as close to this rôle with Bernadette as anyone could have under the circumstances.

Sister Bernard Dalias was a woman of great distinction. She was a talented musician, and a "facile and gracious poet." None of her poetry remains. She was interviewed by Chanoine Guynot in the Convent of Sainte-Angèle d'Olorn in 1934.

On October 30, 1867, when the other girls of the novitiate were taking the veil which had been given Bernadette *in extremis* she was again to make her profession. The Bishop of Nevers presided at this ceremony which was held in the little convent church, and the crowd sought above everything else to identify Bernadette. Save by the extreme smallness of her figure she could not be told from the others.

The motherhouse at Nevers is essentially a training school for the order. The young nuns were then dispersed to the various houses of their order to assume whatever duties were assigned them. Some might teach children, some might care for orphans, some might train the deaf, some might nurse the sick, although this was

not primarily a nursing order. It had been tacitly agreed that Bernadette was to remain at the Nevers house in order that she might be protected from the curiosity of the public. However employment at this motherhouse was usually assigned to someone who had undergone additional training in a secondary house. It was therefore a great privilege for Bernadette to be permitted to remain. Bishop Forcade who was present at the ceremony of assignment, and who presented each nun with her "letter of obedience," says that "the wisdom of Mother Joséphine knew how to make even of this privilege an humiliation."

On the same day on which they took the vows the new Sisters were called together. All were presented with their letters except Bernadette.

"For what reason," asked the Bishop, "has Sister Marie-Bernard not been called? And why have I not been given a letter of obedience for her?"

"Monseigneur," said Mother Joséphine, "it has not been possible to assign her an obedience: she is a little fool who is good for nothing."

The Bishop called for Bernadette. She advanced and knelt. "You aren't good for anything, then? But my poor child what are we going to do with you, and what good is your entry into the congregation?"

"That is just what I said to you, at Lourdes," she answered, "and you assured me that it would not make any difference."

Then Mother Joséphine said, "If you wish it, Monseigneur, we can keep her here through charity and employ her some way in the infirmary. As she is always ill that will be just the thing for her. To begin with, she can do the cleaning. Later she can be taught to

make the beverages, that is if there is any way of teaching her how to do it !”

At a later period Bernadette confessed that this humiliation rendered in public was very bitter to her. But at the time she did not permit her emotion to show. Many years later when almost the same trick was being played on a young girl from Sens, Bernadette comforted and reassured her, for owing to the high esteem in which she was held by the other Sisters, one word from her could offset that of any of the superiors.

If at first she was noticeably moody with flashes of ill-humor, it can certainly be understood. But little by little she learned to hide it and before many years she was able to say to a Sister who had known her at Lourdes, “Now I am indifferent.”

Her wit stood her in good stead, and when people bored her with questions about Lourdes she turned it on them. No one who bored her or fatigued her was likely to be left in doubt. She made progress in her studies too. In February 1868, she wrote a letter to Bishop Laurence which is excellently composed although her French construction is not always correct. The dialect which she spoke until after her fourteenth year is about half-way between French and Spanish and it is surprising that she should have used French as well as she did. She was also fond of playing with words and especially of making acrostics. Since they were made of the names of Jesus and Mary or St. Bernard or other saints, they do not show any original thinking, but they do at least show a definite familiarity with the abstract use of words. These points are stressed in view of the fact that she is popularly supposed to have had limited intelligence.

At one time Dr. Voisin, a physician of the Salpêtrière

Hospital of Paris, lecturing on his theory of hallucinations, made the statement that people so afflicted eventually became insane. He apparently stated that Bernadette was then insane and at that time confined in the Ursuline Convent at Nevers, where the insane were cared for. Dr. Robert St. Cry, President of the Medical Association of the Department of the Nièvre, was asked to report on this. He investigated and reported that she was "far from being of unsound mind," and he added that he was willing to affirm that her "equable character offers an ample safeguard against any danger of this nature. . . . Nothing disposes her to become unbalanced in her nerves or in her spirit."

Miracles were being attributed to her also, and it was said that the Blessed Virgin had appeared to her again.

Questioned about this she said, "Never. At present I am like everybody else."

Except, one may add, that she had more poise and more self control in a situation requiring a maximum of these virtues and of forbearance.

In the month of June, 1867, the railway was at last extended from Lourdes to Pau, shattering the quiet of the grotto and detracting from the beauty of its setting, for the tracks are just across the river. But the pilgrimages had made this extension of the line necessary; and at that time railways were not considered the ugly defacing things that they are today. In writing of them people even became quite lyrical: "Just before arriving at Lourdes, the locomotive, climbing the steep ascent facing the Grotto, slackened its speed and seemed, with its column of steam shooting into the air, and the thunder of its wheels, to be offering the homage of its might and swiftness to the Sovereign of the spot, pledging itself to bear to her feet, for all time to come, a ceaseless and living tribute to her glory." The completion of the line through Lourdes was no small event in the history of the town. It made possible the organization of the enormous pilgrimages of a later date and changed the little town from one of the small and relatively unknown shrines into the enormous pilgrimage city of the present. Lourdes was to become ugly — and to prosper.

Old Dr. Dozous was still in the midst of things. "People often said to me," he writes, "this is your work!"

"Many thanks," he answers. "The work of the Grotto of the Massabielle has a character that is essentially supernatural." And he adds that sundry important people persisted in their former sharp opposition to Lourdes, although they no longer combatted it openly. The number of processions in 1868 was twice that of 1867

and one of them contained 1,100 people. The movement begun at Bayonne and Bordeaux had spread. Many pilgrimages came from Spain, and the Queen of Spain put her name among the founders. During July, August, and September of 1868 there were celebrated between fifty and sixty Masses a day in the crypt of the great church which was in process of construction.

In 1872, the Revolutionary government tried to fight against the pilgrimages to Lourdes. Father Sempé, head of the missionary fathers at the grotto, says that hell was moved by the incomparable joy and edification felt at Lourdes and the press multiplied its blasphemies; the very streets sang the Marseillaise. At Fleurance they burned the oriflammes; at Cette they pursued with ignoble insults the calm and courageous pilgrims of Nîmes; at Perpignan the people were forbidden to go to the station in procession and, as he cannily adds, the ardor of the pilgrims was increased a hundredfold by obstacles and persecutions. Aroused, the town of Roussillon sent three pilgrimages. Gers, Cette, Niort, Poitiers, the Vendée, all hastened to come for fear tomorrow they might be stopped.

Out of these "audacious and crude" attempts at suppression the National French Pilgrimage grew. On October 5, 6, 7 and 8 of 1872, fifty thousand pilgrims were said to have been there. Eight bishops were among them. The basilica was decorated with two hundred and fifty-two banners, including those of Alsace and of Lorraine and there was indescribable emotion over the loss of these provinces.

People who believed in the efficacy of the technique of suppression of beliefs of any sort should read the history of these pilgrimages.

Very little is known of Bernadette's life during the period of the war with Prussia, which the nation had to meet with only the slack hand of Napoleon III on the reins. She did write a number of letters home in which she seemed to express the conviction that France was being punished for its sins. France was indeed being punished. A war badly undertaken, with poor leadership, was being most disastrously pursued.

"They say," she wrote, "that the enemy is approaching Nevers. I could get along very well without seeing the Prussians; but I am not afraid of them. God is everywhere." They were indeed almost at the gates of Nevers. Monseigneur Forcade turned the convent of Saint-Gildard into a hospital, after distributing the younger Sisters through more remote houses of the order. Bernadette he kept at Nevers, as a sort of hostage. Count Lafond, the Bishop said, regarded Bernadette as the palladium of the episcopal city and attributed its salvation to her presence.

In the convent things do not seem to have been greatly changed by the war. One day the young novices, sitting in the Hall of Saint Gertrude, were being read to out of a book about Lourdes. Mother Marie-Thérèse was there in charge at her desk. Suddenly the door was opened and Bernadette entered and advanced simply and modestly to ask a question of Marie-Thérèse about the infirmary.

A word stopped her. "Sister Marie-Bernard, this is not the time for you to show yourself here. Your place is at the infirmary. Kiss the earth and go."

But if the nuns in charge seem to us to have been unduly harsh to Bernadette, certainly it was the general

feeling of the convent that she was a saint. The superiors from the other convents of the order certainly believed so, and they would come to the house at Nevers on whatever pretext they could find. These visiting nuns would walk along the path of "Our Lady of Strength," where Bernadette was most often to be found, and, finding her in some group, stop to ask the group for prayers. Sometimes it was that their students might pass examinations; sometimes more serious difficulties, as once when a little girl was supposed to have been stolen by gypsies. They did not ask Bernadette for prayers individually, to be sure, but it was to be noted that when she was not amongst the group the request was not likely to be made. If anyone did ask her individually, she would respond, "Be calm, here we pray for everyone." Or she would consent but add, "Yes, but you pray for me first." And rumors were always being circulated that someone had been cured by her prayers. Sometimes they would ask her about the fate of some dead person. "Why do you ask me that," she would exclaim angrily.

Celebrities were always invading the convent asking for her. She learned to decline unless she was specifically ordered to appear. But many were the devices to get her where she could be seen or pointed out. On one occasion the mother superior came by a group where she was standing. "You see," she said to a distinguished visitor, "these veils differ. This one is a novice's, this one is of silk, this one" — pointing to Bernadette's — "is Béarnaise." But she had reckoned without Bernadette's wit, for she had quickly pulled the veil over her face so that the visitor might the better see the veil!

Strangers coming to the parlor or the chapel when she was there would ask, "Ma sœur, do you suppose I could

see Bernadette?" "Why certainly, Madame," she would answer. "Just wait a moment for she is going to go through that door." And go she would. When the nuns went in processions to the Cathedral, the public would make a solid barrier bordering the passage, looking for Bernadette. Even in the Cathedral, protected from the eyes of the congregation by her veil, she would be identified and pointed out by the organist or by the young seminarians.

Neither had the long hoped-for silence about the apparitions and the grotto ever materialized. Mother Marie-Thérèse herself was still an offender. When new postulants came she still shepherded them to Bernadette and then, after asking for the story all over again, reminded the girl that the subject was closed. But unfortunately it did not stay closed.

And to the eternal quizzing about the apparitions Bernadette would exclaim, "Oh, how annoying it is! They promised me that they would leave me alone!" she said over and over. But having been detected, or trapped into going for interviews, she was invariably obedient and courteous.

She was often shown pictures of the Virgin, all of which she thought inadequate and most of them ugly. "What a surprise for these artists when they see thee!" she exclaimed. "Mother mine, how they disfigure thee!" "Look at that goitre with which they have deformed the Blessed Virgin!"

To the pompous or to people who invaded her privacy, she showed a sharp edge, but to the unfortunate, or the shy or the lowly she was always most kind. She was always gracious and considerate of the lay help. They too talked of her beautiful eyes and her husky voice "as sweet as her character." One night one of them, Jeanne

Jordet, was ill of pneumonia. Bernadette climbed to the top of the house to the servants' dormitory just to comfort her. "I recognized her by her step on the stair and also by her habit of humming [although humming was against the rules]. As soon as I heard her humming her little chanting air, I said to myself 'There she is!'" And Bernadette sponged the sick girl off, straightened her pillow and comforted and maybe admonished her a bit. She had a kindly feeling for the humble.

But one day when a bishop came who insisted on seeing Bernadette, even though he had to be escorted to the infirmary where she was confined to bed, she was not so kindly. The bishop stood leaning over the sick-bed, leaning farther and farther until it became evident that his violet-colored skull cap would fall on the bed. What a great thing that would be for him! She would hand it to him and it would then be a sacred souvenir. Presently, by a movement either of the head or hand, the cap fell.

But Bernadette was not minded to touch it. It stayed where it had fallen.* "The conversation fell . . . like the cap. And the resulting silence made the problem the more difficult. Bernadette was in the better position; she could wait. It was the bishop who was forced to take the offensive."

When he asked her for it instead of picking it up himself, "his intention was also uncovered." Finally, the Mother Superior intervened. "Come, my dear Sister," she said, laughing, "give the skull cap back to Monseigneur."

Chanoine Guynot, in recounting this incident so delightfully, adds that it was Bernadette herself who said,

* Guynot, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

"It is necessary to know the faults of the Saints; that will encourage us."

With all these difficulties, Bernadette evidently tried desperately hard to find some normal outlet for her love of peace. Within walking distance of Nevers there was a village called Coulanges. It was little more than a crossroads with a few houses and the tiny church of Notre-Dame-des-Anges. But the burial ground beside the church sloped away to the river, and the lane beside it was lined with poplars, as was the river bank itself. Commerce had not yet reached the river and Coulanges was still secluded and remote. She loved the little church. It was not an old church but it was very simple and lacking in ornateness and so was very pretty. The flat Romanesque arches supported an altar ceiling that was painted dark blue. On the left of the altar was a statue of Notre-Dame-des-Anges; on the right the Roman martyr, Saint Expedit. Now, dominating all, is a large statue of Bernadette.

Across from the little church there was an enclosed bit of ground which belonged to an educational institution. There was in the grounds a small summer house — a sort of retreat to which the nuns of Nevers used to go. Bernadette was very fond of it. Sometimes she went there with Sister Bernard Dalias who had become a teacher at Monchal, only a few minutes' walk away. Once a week Sister Bernard was free, and on those days she often hunted up Bernadette at Saint-Gildard whether she was in the infirmary or at work elsewhere. Sometimes when Bernadette was well enough they walked to Coulanges for a little outing. One day the road was tiring and hot. Bernadette, noticing her friend's discomfort, began joking with her. "My poor Bernard,

you can't go on any longer! You are half cooked!" They reached the little retreat, but there, in course of the afternoon, as they were enjoying themselves, a messenger came from the convent recalling them, as several bishops had arrived to question Bernadette. "Oh, those good bishops," she exclaimed, "how much better it would be for them to remain quietly in their dioceses, instead of coming to trouble us when we were so happy here."

She loved the poplars at Coulanges. They reminded her of Lourdes! But then poplars always reminded her of Lourdes. Once after the evening meal, when she and Sister Bernard were sitting near an open door at Saint-Gildard, Bernadette exclaimed, "Oh, those poplars [in a little meadow on the lower terrace], they make me shiver! They make me cold! They remind me of those by the stream at Lourdes."

But such little moments of escape were rare. Her every movement was watched either by critical or by adoring eyes. The young postulants and novices especially were a constant responsibility. They wanted her to place their veils. "All those I place will stay on," she would say and laugh. But it was no laughing matter to the young nuns, for they considered her a prophet. She was a very orderly person, and loved to see things done well. A poorly arranged veil annoyed her, and the girls apparently were not above putting their veils a bit awry in order to have her straighten them.

The devices that were used to see or to touch her were infinite. Anything that she touched became valuable. "Now you are going to try to make me do something foolish," she would exclaim when they would hand her something in order to be able to say that she had touched it. One day she was distributing candies, little coated almonds, to some visiting children, but hardly had the

children left the room when all the candies were persuaded away from them as souvenirs. "And for all I know they were placed under glass," says the teller of the tale.

When she worked in the linen room every scrap that her scissors let fall was cherished. Even her good friend, Sister Bernard Dalias, had a pocket full of these which were inadvertently exposed in front of a superior, much to her embarrassment.

One day Bernadette left her old black shawl on her bed in the infirmary. On her return she found a new one in its place. Sister Marie-Euphrasie had brought it in exchange for Bernadette's old one which she carried back to her own convent at Cahors where it was cut into tiny pieces for relics.

The Mother Superior of Bordeaux, Mother Marie, went to see Bernadette in the infirmary one day and, finding someone helping her with her hair, she quickly cut a strand of it to take back to Bordeaux. Sister Marcella, who regularly helped Bernadette to make her toilet during one illness, was so besieged by requests for snips of hair that she went to Father Febvre, her confessor, with her problem. "Give it," he advised her, "and don't say anything about it."

As the young nuns passed her they touched her robe, or unseen kissed her veil. One young postulant regularly managed to come down the stairs each morning as Bernadette did. And there, each time she met her, she kissed her. One day on the path of "Our Lady of the Waters" where she loved to walk, at the farthest corner of the convent, Bernadette caught one of them kissing her veil. She stopped, very angry, — then controlling herself with difficulty, "Mademoiselle, you know that that is not allowed."

To another she said, "Mademoiselle, why do you laugh so much in the refectory — you are inclined to be frivolous." At which the girl openly declared that it was her joy at seeing Bernadette which unstrung her. But she added, quickly, "Please pray for my amendment!"

As the girls walked away from the dining-room, hands in sleeves, eyes lowered, they instinctively raised their eyes and gazed at Bernadette as they passed her place. They saw in her "the mystery of the beauty of the supernatural."

Sometimes she would be the reader during exercises and her husky voice filled everyone with happy pity. "The poor little saint," they would murmur.

They fought for the privilege of being in the infirmary with her. More than one of them must have prayed for illnesses that would put them under her care. "But not too grave an illness," one Sister stipulated, "for then I would be sent away." Almost immediately she had the "joyful surprise" of a case of angina and the memory was one of the sweetest of her life.

Sometimes it was more than Bernadette could stand. Once, caring for a young girl in the infirmary, she exclaimed, "Ma petite, don't look at me like that." And she covered the girl's eyes with her hand. But the girl then only closed her eyes the more closely to keep the memory of the touch of Bernadette's fingers.

To see her, to be near her, to touch her, to touch or possess something that she had touched or possessed — that was the prevailing spiritual need of an enormous part of her world. Rarely has anyone lived in modern times who walked in such an atmosphere of veneration. Whatever the warnings, no one could protect her.

But most of all, her world loved to watch her make the sign of the cross. They were sure that she had been

taught to make it so by the Blessed Virgin herself. They felt with Monsieur Estrade, "If they make the sign of the cross in Heaven, it must be just as she does it."

And one and all they tried to describe her beautiful eyes: they were indeed hard eyes to describe! Not exactly black, not exactly brown, but very dark indeed and with a trace of gray-blue in them. "First of all, youth," they said, "they were the beautiful large eyes of a child." "Angelic purity." "Reflection of innocence." "Clarity and frankness." "Physical beauty of looks, moral beauty of the heart." To them all "her clear look seemed still to reflect that of the Blessed Virgin."

Catholic opinion had already canonized her. But even though she moved quite unspoiled by all this adulation and veneration and tried her best to escape it, it is easy to understand why the older nuns should have feared the effect of this on her character. They did not, apparently know that to all but the most shallow-minded this very adoration from the public carries its own antidote.

When someone asked her if she did not feel her present rôle to be too insignificant, she replied, "What do you do with a broom when you have finished sweeping with it? You put it behind the door, don't you?" And when someone else asked why she thought she had been chosen to see the apparitions she answered, "I only acted the part of the oxen at Bétharram who turned up the statue by chance when they were plowing. If the Blessed Virgin could have found someone more ignorant than I, she would have chosen her; she picked me up under a pebble."

In summing Bernadette up, the older nuns said that although she was stubborn and had very definite ideas, and was sometimes rebellious, she was always deeply peni-

tent afterward. She was indeed very often capricious, difficult and ill-humored, but continual pain may have accounted for much of this. Whenever she was well enough to work, she did work. Nowadays she would be given complete rest for her tuberculosis, but at that time there was no treatment for it, and the enormous number of people who insisted on kissing her shows how indefinite was the idea that it was contagious.

It is interesting that when she was really seriously ill, she was most amiable and good-tempered. Then she worked away quite contentedly on little pieces of embroidery which she did with skill, or she scraped tiny designs on eggshell and colored them a bit. But when she was better she was again irritable and impulsive. Perhaps the explanation lies partly in the fact that when she was ill she was at least a bit more protected than when she was well.

Most of the women who have gone into convents have had some happy years to look back on. They have experienced a normal childhood, while previous to Bernadette's fourteenth year she had had only illness, drudgery, hunger and, to a great extent, neglect. From her fourteenth year onward she had had hardly one hour of even nominal freedom and there had certainly been no alternative for her but the convent. No one had ever, apparently, seriously attempted to help her find one, with the possible exception of the one unnamed rich woman who is said to have wanted to adopt her.

From the time of her apparitions she had been preoccupied, even obsessed, with the necessity of praying for sinners. Her apparition had told her to and it was not forgotten when she had passed beyond adolescence. Her preoccupation would today and in our society certainly be considered close to a compulsive drive although it did

not seem so in that time and place. Along with this necessity to think of the punishment of sinners, there ran an impulsive and charming gaiety, while on another level still those who observed her well saw in her "something like a sorrowful regret, a deep nostalgia as for happiness disappeared."

In the furthest corner of the last terrace beyond the vegetable gardens, at the very end of the walls, there is a tiny bower and a rock pedestal where a statue of "Our Lady of the Water" stands. It is hidden a bit by the large spring-houses close by. That was Bernadette's place of retreat.

Of her spiritual consolations it is not within my province to write, but Bernadette had still another retreat : on loose leaves, or on old copy-books, she kept a sort of diary. These leaves have been bound together now and are the revered property of the convent. Only occasional excerpts from them have been made public, but when a full transcription is published, which surely it will be before too long, a great contribution will have been made to hagiography and to the knowledge of the inner life of Bernadette Soubirous after she became Sister Marie-Bernard.

After the beginning of the year 1873, Bernadette's health grew much worse. Her knee was also beginning to be affected with tuberculosis. The convent doctor suggested that she be released from even her nominal duties in the infirmary, and so in 1874 she was removed from that work and given the care of the sacristy of the little convent chapel. It is an unassuming little chapel with a main altar for the nuns and a side altar for the use of the public, approached directly from the courtyard. There is a small gallery on the level of the upper floor to which Bernadette had easy access, and into this little Gallery of St. Joseph she would go, when her health permitted, to attend the services.

But her main calling now was to permit herself to be shown to those who would be made happy by it. She was taken to Varennes to the orphanage to be shown to the orphans. Word had gone through the institution from parlor to laundry, "Quick, quick, Bernadette is in the hall. We are going to see Bernadette." There were a hundred and twenty-five of these children standing and gazing at her solemnly when Bernadette was pushed in in a wheel chair. She looked at them all, gently and tenderly, and she spoke a few words, very simply, about the love of the Blessed Virgin.

Mother Eulalie brought forward a big girl, Agnes Martin, and presented her. "My dear Sister, I recommend this one to you, she is soon to leave us and go out into the world. Pray for her." Bernadette looked at the girl for a moment and smiled. "Be calm," she said.

"This Agnes will indeed remain good." Before she went away, she kissed each one of the class.

Later she went again to Varennes, but this time on a stretcher. The girls were brought to her lying there on her couch so that each one might gaze on her for a moment, for at least a look and a smile.

Bernadette's health really did not permit her to work at all, although one Sister recalled seeing her arranging flowers to decorate the statue of the Blessed Virgin. She could sometimes be seen in the garden embroidering an alb or, by the statue of the Sacred Heart, filling a little box with very small golden roses. And to her friend, Sister Bernard Dalias, Bernadette would talk of the children of the school and say, "Make them love the Blessed Virgin" or "Make them pray for me."

Bernadette did not lose her love for a joke. On one All Saints' day Sister Eléonore, hearing that she was ill, gathered a handful of late violets she found blooming along the kitchen wall and sent them to Bernadette with the message : "Dear Sister, today is your feast day, since it is the feast of All Saints."

"Since it is my feast day, it is yours also," said Bernadette, "and I return you half the gift without scruple."

Nor did she lose her capacity for indignation. Father Nury, a Jesuit, was preaching to the Sisters one August day in 1876. Bernadette had hobbled into the gallery on a cane from her place in the Infirmary of St. Brigitte. Carried away, perhaps, by this nearness of Bernadette, the Jesuit forgot himself and preached a sermon about her. "The white veils were motionless with surprise," says Chanoine Guynot. But Bernadette was not motionless. The door was only a few steps away ; painfully raising herself on her cane, she escaped to safety.

She did not because of her own illness become indif-

ferent to the suffering of others. One day when Sister Alphonse went in to help her to dress, she discovered to her horror that Bernadette's lovely black hair had been cut off. It had been sold to buy the freedom of a negress, but whom she freed in this way is not known.

One feels that through these years she found more and more solace in the spiritual life. She became more immersed in the ways of the convent, and something like a wild natural desire to escape the confinement of the life seems to have left her at last.

In 1876, the Basilica at Lourdes had been completed and the statue of Our Lady crowned. It was a gorgeous ceremony : thirty-five prelates, a cardinal, three thousand priests and one hundred thousand people. There had been whispers in the crowd : the future canonization of Sister Marie-Bernard, the little Bernadette, was in no doubt.

The ancient church in which Bernadette had worshipped was now doomed. The Curé Peyramale, a good churchman but a poor antiquarian, had decided to build a new parish church and so the Church of the Sacred Heart had been started a few hundred yards from the old building. A public square and a cross are all that remain to mark the site of the old church. In 1877 the Curé Peyramale was buried in the crypt of the new church. This priest who had played so important a part in the drama of Bernadette died on the day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, September the 8th. High Mass was said for him in the Basilica that Bernadette had asked him to raise for the honor of her Lady. It had been such a short time, as years go, since the day of Bernadette ! But Lourdes had gone a long way since that night when the Curé Peyramale, in a great temper,

had said to her, "Out ! Out of here ! Or I will sweep you out with a broom !"

In March 1878, Mother Joséphine Imbert died and Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou withdrew from the motherhouse in Nevers in order to recover her own health. Fortunately, the woman who replaced these sisters was Mother Adélaïde Dons, a robust woman, handsome and distinguished, a native of Castres. She admired and loved Bernadette and did not feel that anything was needed to keep her humble. Mother Adélaïde brightened the last of Bernadette's life wherever she could and she would go herself with a wheel-chair and take her out for a few moments of sun and peace under the autumn skies.

On September 22, 1878, Bernadette, as Sister Marie-Bernard, made her perpetual and final vows in the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, where she had spent most of her adult life.

In the autumn of 1878 Pierre wrote her to remonstrate, in the name of all her family, at the rarity of her letters.

She replied :

"This is the reason why I write you so rarely : I have been told that my letters go everywhere. That caused me pain, and if it happens again I will not write any more to anyone."

It is significant of her character that she did not think of herself as a saint. She never did become reconciled to being put on a pedestal. She would not even permit herself to be held up as a martyr to pain. When asked how she did, she would reply, "Today as yesterday. Yesterday as today."

In October she had a brief moment of human happiness. Someone arranged for her brother, Jean-Marie, to

come to see her. Bernadette was brought in to Mother Adélaïde's parlor and there she saw him briefly. Their emotion, says Chanoine Guynot, was so great that for a few moments they leaned against each other, speech dissolved in tears. And then they said goodbye.

One day Bernadette went into the room of some other sick girls to cheer them up. She told them amusing stories and mimicked Dr. Roberts, the physician whom she had never liked very well. They laughed a great deal and were very gay. But on returning to her room, a violent attack of hemorrhage of the lungs recurred and she was again desperately ill. She lay unable to make the least movement without loss of blood, suffering acutely, her face pinched and white, her eyes, under the arch of her dark brows, darker and more beautiful than ever.

She would say, half in earnest, half in jest, "If you desire to be a good nun, you must learn to love suffering."

One day when one of the Mothers jokingly said, "What are you doing here in bed, Lazybones?" she answered, "I am working away at my calling, dear Mother, I am being ill."

If the days were spent in intense suffering, the nights were worse. Hour after hour passed in the effort to find a comfortable position for her knee, which had developed a tuberculous ulcer. Her face became cadaverous. Slight continuous moans escaped her lips, but she would not complain.

And through the days she worked with her thin hands at the delicate task of decorating eggshells with hearts; those eggshells that everyone valued so and that were at the time considered so true an art.

But on December 11th she again sank very low. On the 12th and 13th she was visited by the bishops of Tarbes

and Nevers, and in the presence of the superior general of the congregation and of the council, asked to repeat the long story of the apparitions. She was in the presence of death — but it was twenty years after the events that she was being asked to describe, and though she was able to give the substance of the events, the chronology had become vague to her. She herself suggested that the account that she had given nearest the events was the most reliable.*

Bernadette still had the Béarnais salt on her tongue. When asked at length about the disposition of the Blessed Virgin's veil, its length, width, folds, she answered, "Can I remember all that? If they want to know that let them make her reappear."

Mother Sophie of Cahors had sent her a large crucifix which she hung over her bed. Objects of piety hung about her. Enclosed by its white curtains her little bed became a sort of sanctuary for her. "I'm happier now," she said, "with my crucifix here over the bed, than a queen on a throne." A little gilt monstrance was pinned to the curtain and there was a picture of an altar with the priest and the acolyte and the children of the choir. "Only," she said of the picture, "I worry about that little acolyte. He never gets to ring the bell."

* At about this same time, records of interviews were being made at Lourdes also and these records, augmented by those of the original investigation by the Bishop of Tarbes constitute the body of fact on which Père Cros drew for his three-volume history.

She had resigned herself to her own inevitable end ; her pain was so great that death could hold little terror for her. All through the night, the same involuntary moan was forced from her lips, but when the clock would strike she would stifle it briefly, repeating, "Blessed be the hour and the moment when our Lord died for us !"

Many people came in to see her. Children were brought to her ; even young babies, to be smiled at, to be touched. On March the 19th, St. Joseph's day, her sister Toinette at last came from Lourdes to tell her good-bye, but there is no record of this interview.

One day Mother Eléonore came in. "We are praying to God for your relief."

"No, not relief," she answered, "patience !"

The Abbé Febvre asked her what she had asked of St. Joseph on his day and she answered, "The favor of a good death."

They spoke to her of the sacrifice that she was making of her life. "No," she said, "it isn't a sacrifice to leave a poor life where one meets so many difficulties in order to belong to God."

Those last nights her mind went back to the first days at the grotto. In her delirium her memories were dis-

torted and the tiny pebble which was cast against her shoulder by Toinette became the great one that reverberated against the cavern wall. During one of these nights, she cried out again and again for help. Perspiration bathed her face and she said in a choked voice, "I was down there — at the Massabielle. There was a little boy there who threw rocks into the stream!"

On March the 28th, she was given Extreme Unction and she begged pardon of them all for the trouble that she was causing them in dying. And she implored their forgiveness for the bad example she had set them, "Above all, for my pride," she added.

April came, but as the lovely French spring advanced she barely remained alive. And then, on Easter Sunday, April the 13th, she asked the plenary indulgence given by the Pope, to which she was entitled as a member of the Order of St. Francis.

It was on that day also that a number of nuns were permitted to file in discreetly and gaze on her in a moment of farewell. The white curtains of the bed had been lifted to admit air so they were supposed to stand at some distance in order to respect her sleep. But her friend, Sister Bernard Dalias, unable to accept this separation calmly, stepped impulsively to the side of the bed.

Bernadette lay with her face to the wall. Suddenly she opened her eyes and turned them on her friend, and stretching out her little burning hand to her, she cried, "Goodbye, Bernard, goodbye! It is finished. This time it is finished!" Bernard, overcome, started to press her lips to Bernadette's hand in veneration but Bernadette, sensing this, withdrew her hand and putting it back under the cover turned her face away.

In the night of Tuesday she sank into a half stupor

from which only delirium aroused her. She thought the devil was tempting her, and she would cry out in terror, "Begone, Satan! Get thee hence, Satan! Begone!" until her nurses would comfort her with invocations of the name of Jesus.

When morning came, she could no longer breathe lying down and was placed in a chair. She wanted her crucifix in her hands, but she was afraid that in the hour of death she would drop it and so she had it bound tight to her breast.

About one o'clock, the chaplain was called hurriedly to confess her again, and Mother Eléonore, standing by, tried to comfort her. The nuns, kneeling, recited in unison the prayers for the dying, while she repeated in her little failing voice all the responses that were suggested to her.

Suddenly, she pressed the crucifix closer to herself in a terrible spasm of pain. "All this is good for Heaven!" she cried.

Presently she raised herself a little in her chair and asked for water. They moistened her lips while she made, with her beautiful last gesture, the sign of the cross as her Lady had made it. Afterwards she was still for a few moments.

"Jesus, Mary, Joseph," chanted the nuns, "help us in our last agony."

And then they heard her saying in a low voice, as she sank back, "Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me! — a poor sinner, a poor sinner. . ."

Sister Gabrielle, who had nursed her, closed her eyes. It was over. It was shortly after three o'clock on Easter Wednesday, April 16, 1879.

She lay in state in the chapel of the convent, a wreath



The Body of Bernadette at Nevers

photo Yvon

of white roses over her veil, rosary in her hands, crucifix on her breast.

The tidings of her death had spread. A drenching rain was falling, but crowds of people besieged the chapel. Everyone wanted something that had touched her. Four Sisters were kept busy touching her body with objects which the public brought with them for that purpose. Presently all the shops had sold out all the medals and rosaries and other pious objects and the people began presenting whatever of metal they had ; their scissors or thimbles, their knives or tools. On the last day of state, Saturday the 19th, the park and road leading to the convent were filled with people. "The Saint is dead !" they all cried. "The Saint is dead !"

Slowly, they took her down to the Cathedral ; Father Sempé, her old friend, now superior of the Fathers at the Grotto, Abbé Pomian her first confessor, still chaplain of the Hospice at Lourdes, and innumerable others.

"It is honorable," read the Bishop from the book of Tobias, "to reveal and confess the works of God."

She was taken back and again put into the convent chapel where a private Mass was said. She had been placed in a coffin of oak and into this now were placed accounts of her life written on parchment. Her body was surrounded with sawdust, mixed with charcoal.* The oak coffin was sealed and placed in a leaden one.

Then the sealed casket was taken down to the tiny chapel of St. Joseph that stood on the lowest terrace of the garden. There, again, it lay in state while the vault was being prepared. And when at last she was placed in the vault, the stone was inscribed in French and Latin which, translated, reads :

* In the published reports of her burial, the sawdust and charcoal are not mentioned, but in the accounts of her exhumation on September 22, 1909, they are. See Bordenave, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

BERNADETTE OF LOURDES

HERE REPOSES
IN THE PEACE OF THE LORD
BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS :
FAVORED AT LOURDES IN 1858
WITH NUMEROUS APPARITIONS OF THE
MOST BLESSED VIRGIN :
IN RELIGION
SISTER MARIE-BERNARD :
DECEASED AT NEVERS
IN THE MOTHERHOUSE
OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY
APRIL 16TH, 1879
IN THE 36TH YEAR OF HER AGE
AND THE 12TH OF HER RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

"This is my rest forever and ever. Here will I dwell, for
I have chosen it."

REST IN PEACE

PART IV
THE CURES

1

Although most people have heard of Lourdes there is a great deal of misunderstanding as to just exactly what it is and what happens there. Many are even under the impression that the shrine dates from medieval days. There has always been a deep-seated belief in the possibility of cures occurring under certain circumstances outside the known laws of science. This belief, in fact, antedates Christianity. Pilgrims went to the Temple of Æsculapius, and to the graves of the Trojan soldiers. Wherever man has been venerated as a martyr or as a saint, the people have felt that some force was working for the cure of bodily and spiritual ills, some force outside of and beyond the ordinary and accepted scope of medical science.

It is hard to look at the facts of Lourdes dispassionately. The conservative tendencies of human thinking and feeling make it uncomfortable to consider anything that does not already agree with accepted beliefs. It is as though one's mind said to itself, "If one of my beliefs is false then I may have to re-examine all of my beliefs." This is indeed a very real threat to comfort.

Protestants claim that Catholics accept without critical examination all of the things presented as miraculous,

but counter claims might with justice be made against Protestants that we also reject, without critical examination. It is essential to remember that whether the cause of a thing is what it appears to be or not, it remains always to be dispassionately considered.

Certain it is that many people go to Lourdes sick and come away well, but no effort is made in this book either to prove or to disprove the possibility of miraculous cure. Even the word miracle belongs to the church and to the mass of people rather than to the student of human behavior. It is not even within the scope of this book to present arguments about these cases. The place for that is in a technical book where such material as fever charts and medical reports can more appropriately be studied and in which the theory of ordinary cure and convalescence can also be discussed.* But as a student of human behavior one would not be justified in repudiating without examination, any belief long held by the race to be true.

Sick people go to Lourdes in great numbers : perhaps twenty thousand a year. By far the vast majority of these sick people go away as sick as when they came. The medical bureau accepts the evidence of cure in only a very few cases a year.

But Lourdes offers the best place for the study of unexpected cures today because of the existence there of the medical board which examines all claims for cures.†

The *Bureau des Constatations Médicales* was founded in 1882. It consists of a president who is a permanent officer and an association of some three thousand physicians in all parts of the world. It is known as the

* Such a book is in preparation by Doctor Smiley Blanton.

† So far as we are able to find out this board is unique in the history of shrines.

Association Médicale Internationale de Notre-Dame de Lourdes. It is predominantly Catholic, although interested Protestants may belong to it. This association gives voluntary service.

From the time of its founding the Bureau has had five presidents : Doctors Dunot de St. Malcon, Boissarie, Le Bec, Marchand and the present incumbent, Dr. Vallet.*

The medical bureau does not pronounce a cure to be a miracle. That is a function of the Church. The function of the bureau is to decide :

1. Are there certificates that show the malady to have existed at the time of the pilgrimage to Lourdes ?
2. Was the malady suddenly stopped in its evolution at a time when there was no tendency to an improvement ? And what morbid symptoms disappeared at that time ?
3. Was there a cure ? In what way can it be proven ? Did the cure take place with or without the use of medicine ?
4. In the present state of science is a medical explanation of this cure likely to be given ?

The board attempts to confine its studies entirely to cases of organic illness and rejects many cases which to the mind of a psychiatrist are equally important and interesting.

Use is made of X-rays and of the usual laboratory techniques in examinations, although such checking is usually done elsewhere on the return home of the pilgrim.

Certain symptomatic behavior is important to the board. There must be instantaneous cure and also a

* Doctor Auguste Vallet has been the president of the *Bureau des Constatations* of Lourdes since 1926. He is also president of the International Association of Physicians of Notre Dame de Lourdes. He received his doctor's degree (medicine) at the University of Bordeaux in 1899. He has been a student of the School of Naval Physicians of Bordeaux, a physician of the first class of Colonial Troops and a professor at the Franco-Chinese Institute at Shanghai.

virtual lack of convalescence. There is also an effort made to determine if an organic cure can have occurred previous to the visit to Lourdes, leaving only the functional cure to be accomplished.

It is an interesting thing often noted at the meetings of the Bureau that Dr. Vallet tends to challenge the statements presented for his judgment in a much less lenient manner than even the visiting Protestant doctors think necessary. And the obvious cases of psychiatric interest, whether accompanied by organic conditions or not, are summarily disposed of.

Many cases which it might conceivably be to the interest of the board to pronounce cures, are not so pronounced.

The objection is often brought against the pronouncement of cures at Lourdes that the medical men of France are in secret agreement with Lourdes. This is to impugn the honesty of some of the best known and most highly valued medical men of the present time. It must also be remembered that a very high percentage of intellectual France is "free-thinking," and many are entirely out of sympathy with Lourdes.

It is true that case history material is neither gathered nor recorded in the ways that is customary in American institutions where diagnosis is an article of faith, but such material as is presented certainly can not be laid on one side.

With the advance in methods of diagnosis such as the X-ray, the number of cures pronounced as such have markedly lessened. Exact statistics are not available but during the time of some of the previous doctors as high as two hundred cures a year were pronounced. At the present time roughly a hundred people a year claim to be cured; all but about thirty are ruled out because of

missing records, or other factors, and of these thirty, between eight and fifteen a year are declared cured. Of approximately 100 cures allowed since 1926, it is interesting to note that about 65 were of tuberculosis.

The Bureau is housed in the building formed under the ramps leading to the upper churches. On one side of the room windows open on the tree-lined Square of the Rosary. Through the windows on the other side can be seen the river Gave and the road between, where the procession of the Host starts.

The room is not large but it is packed to capacity with waiting physicians. Dr. Vallet sits back of a table with his secretaries and assistants. Every chair is taken ; men slip in and stand along the wall. A doctor in an army uniform stands at ease, an elderly doctor wearing high boots and rough clothing is slumped in a chair reading the *Imitation of Christ*. Late-comers crowd the door. The room is silent. There is an occasional whisper ; an occasional cough. Outside the singing is beginning,

“Lauda Sion Salvatorem.”

This room is a curious and moving sight. It would be easy to imagine oneself in the staff-room of an ordinary hospital waiting for the presentation of some interesting case.

The door opens. A young woman comes in with some papers in her hand. The crowd moves slightly. It is about to begin to study a case in which there is a possibility of a miracle.

Is this person cured ?
Was she really sick ?

Does God reach down his Almighty hand and interfere in the lives of men ?

Is there some law of healing unknown and as yet unstudied ?

Can faith heal the sick ?

Is the healing due to suggestion ?

If so, was the sickness also due to suggestion ?

Was it a disease of the mind rather than the body ?

Can one then divide the mind from the body ?

Is there then something as yet unread which, as Dr. Vallet so aptly puts it, is inscribed on the margin of the laws of nature ?

“This I know,” says the girl, “that whereas I was sick, now I am well.”

The two pilgrims whose claims are presented here went to Lourdes in the summer of 1936. A sufficient time has therefore elapsed to give some idea of how substantial the cure is and to make at least a partial check on the medical certification. The pilgrims are Charles McDonald and Louise Jamain.

The Case of Charles McDonald

Charles McDonald was born in August of 1905 in Dublin, Ireland.

When he was fourteen he left his parochial school and went to St. Edmund's College in Hertfordshire, England, where he intended eventually to study for the priesthood. He was a well-built sturdy boy, five feet six inches in height, who played football and took part in other sports. At seventeen he decided that he was not suited to the priesthood and left St. Edmund's to return to Dublin where he hoped to finish his education, but before he had quite completed a training which would parallel our high school course, he withdrew and apprenticed himself in his father's business of carpentry and building. At nineteen, in January 1924, he was married.

Less than a year later, when he had just entered his twentieth year, he became ill. In January of 1925 he went to Dr. J. Young of Sandymount, Dublin, who after a careful laboratory and physical study, diagnosed his illness as tuberculosis of the lungs and sent him to New Castle, the state sanatorium in County Wicklow, where

he remained for five or six weeks. He had active hemorrhages of the lungs with laboratory tests positive for tuberculosis. Before he had become ill he had weighed 142 pounds : at the sanatorium his weight was as low as 115.

In July 1925, although he was not considered strong enough to travel, he and his wife went to Johannesburg in the Transvaal, South Africa, hoping to benefit by the change in climate. From then until 1931 he was apparently fairly well. But one day as he was riding a motorcycle to work he began to have great pain in his back. And as the pain became very intense he went for further examination to the Far East Rand Hospital, Brakpan, Transvaal, where a diagnosis was made of tuberculosis of the twelfth dorsal vertebra of the spine and he was placed in a cast from his shoulders to his hips.

But at the end of three months as he showed no improvement he decided to return to Dublin. Back in Dublin he was found to be too ill with pulmonary tuberculosis for the operation on his spine which was proposed and he was placed in a steel brace instead.

In August of 1932 his right arm and shoulder became involved and by the summer of 1935 he had many abscesses around his shoulder, chest and back ; open and draining pus.

Then he developed an acute inflammation of the kidney (tubercular nephritis) and was sent to the Meath Hospital. His pain was so great that he has only a dim memory of his stay there but at last, in November of that year (1935), it was suggested that he go to the Hospice for the Dying, the Hospital for chronic cases, at Harold's Cross. Since, however, he wanted to be with his wife and three children, he returned home, presumably to die.

Until June, 1936, his physician came to the house. He had taught Charles' wife to dress the open and suppurating wounds, and since nothing more could be done the physician ceased to come. Charles and his wife had opened a little tobacco shop, which his wife tended, but which was not thriving and often they were even on a very limited diet for they were too proud to make their want known.

McDonald was entirely bed-ridden for fourteen months. He could help himself a bit, move his own hips, and shave himself as he lay in bed, but only with acute pain. His shoulder joint had grown together (ankylosed) and his twelfth thoracic vertebra had been destroyed. To sit up on the side of the bed for even the few minutes necessary to dress his wounds left him nauseated and faint.

There was no prospect of his improvement. He was poverty-stricken, desperately ill and at the end of his resources. It was then, at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, that Father Vaughn, his pastor, spoke to him of Lourdes and of the pilgrimages.

Charles McDonald was a conscientious Catholic and in no sense a fanatic. But Father Vaughn's words set him to thinking and slowly the conviction grew in him that if he could only get to Lourdes he could indeed be cured.

It is necessary for any sick person going on a pilgrimage to Lourdes to carry a certificate from his physician stating what his illness is and how serious it is. During the second week in August his medical form was filled in; "Potts disease, caries, nephritis, and a tubercular shoulder." He had had fifteen X-ray photographs and many bacteriological examinations at first grade hospitals that

showed evidence of tuberculosis. Five open sores on his back and shoulder were of necessity dressed twice daily.

It was arranged for him to go on the Catholic Young Men's Society pilgrimage leaving Dublin on September 3rd, 1936. Presumably he made the customary spiritual preparations.

It is a long distance from Dublin to Lourdes. First across the water between Ireland and England, then across England and the Channel to France and along the western part of France to the Pyrenees and then eastward to Lourdes. But the magic of those September nights in France was probably lost on Charles McDonald lying in desperate pain and equally desperate hope on a stretcher in a train.

When the stretchers of the sick are taken from the trains at Lourdes they are slipped into large ambulances and taken directly to one of the hospitals that are especially run for the pilgrims. These are the "Asile Notre Dame," and the "Sept Douleurs" where the sick live in large wards, crowded but clean, and are provided with nourishing French food.

At 6 a.m. Charles McDonald was awakened, at 6:30 he was carried to the front of the Grotto for Mass. The first immersion in the water of the fountain of the Massabielle on Sunday, September 6, 1936, left him unchanged. He was conscious only of the cold and the shock. The open sores, of which there were five, three about the shoulder and two about the back remained unchanged. On that day no miracle had occurred to Charles McDonald.

Monday morning, the seventh of September, he was rolled again to the bath, more dead than alive, and

watched with care by the *brancardier* to be certain that the flame of his existence did not flicker out. After immersion in the icy water his stretcher was rolled back in front of the grotto.

There he lay confused and bewildered. Suddenly he realized that he felt no pain. He thought perhaps that it was the shock of the icy mountain water. But he waited a while and there was no return of the pain.

It had been years since he had moved without pain so slowly he shifted his hips !

He slipped the brace from his arm and shifted his shoulder — the great test. But still no pain.

His confusion of mind was very great. He lay deep in thought, at a complete loss concerning what to believe. Twisting and turning this thing over in his mind he could feel nothing inside himself but a sense of well-being ! Gone the old feeling of sickness, the pain, the despair, the defeat ; only a glowing sense of health restored, of wellness and vitality remained.

It was not until bedtime that he could bring himself to speak of it. Then he told the *brancardier* who was helping him to bed that the next morning he would get up and dress. The nurses remonstrated, but Dr. Hannigan the physician of the pilgrimage, permitted it and so the next morning, Tuesday, September the 8th, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he got up and with some assistance dressed himself.

During the day he rode in a wheel-chair, but after the blessing of the sick at the procession of the Host he walked into the Church of the Rosary where he knelt and prayed. He did not go back to bed until 8 o'clock that night. This was the first time that he had been out of bed for fourteen months.

The next day he dressed unaided and went to the

grotto alone, and, unaided, undressed and entered the bathing pool and redressed himself. That afternoon he got into the bus unaided and also into the train, where he slept all night dressed, lying huddled up on a seat. He reached Paris at nine o'clock and ate a hearty breakfast.

Such had been his state of mind that he had completely failed to think of the sores and therefore to go before the Bureau before leaving Lourdes. It had been September 7th when he felt himself to be cured. This was now September 10th. His wounds had been dressed on the 5th by the senior nurse or matron of the pilgrimage who testified that they were open and draining freely. It was she who dressed them again in Paris. Three were entirely well, one had a slight scab, one a drop of clear serous exudate.

A week or ten days later his physician in Dublin examined him. The wounds were substantially the same as in Paris. Laboratory tests showed some albumen in the urine; but all tests, and also X-rays, showed an absence of any signs of tuberculosis except the ones that would be present in any case of healed disease.

For a few weeks he stayed in a convalescent home to avoid the constant stream of curious or devout visitors. In October, 1936, he took up life where he had laid it down and began to hunt work.

In August of 1937 he returned to Lourdes to appear before the medical board. On this pilgrimage he acted as stretcher-bearer.

Returning home he took a position which required the driving of a car on an average of 800 miles a week. This he held until January 1938, when he found a better position with a company in Dublin where he is at present

employed. He states (May 1939), "I have not been ill a day since."

The Case of Louise Jamain

Louise Jamain was born in Paris, November 1, 1914. In November of 1927 she was taken ill with what was diagnosed as appendicitis, but which proved to be a prolonged and serious illness. She was operated on in November of 1927; twice in December of 1930; once in March of 1931. At this time she developed pulmonary tuberculosis and was sent to the tuberculosis service of the hospital where her chest was drained three times. In November 1931, she had still another operation making five abdominal operations in all and in December she was placed in a preventorium for treatment of her tuberculosis.

But at this time great tragedy befell her. Her father died in August of 1931, her mother in November of 1932, and between these two dates fifteen months apart, her four brothers aged three, nine, eleven and twelve died also. Her mother and four brothers died of tuberculosis.

In April of 1933 she went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes but was not benefited and a few months later, since she now had no home, she was admitted to the orphanage of the Sisters of Nevers at Versailles. Her fifth and last brother disappeared during the wreck of the submarine *Acheron* in August 1934.

In 1935 being somewhat improved she started her studies to be a nurse, but the tuberculosis of the lungs again became active and she was rehospitalized. With a few slight remissions of her symptoms she became steadily worse, with what appears to have been pulmo-

nary, peritoneal and intestinal tuberculosis, both bacteriologically and clinically confirmed.

At twenty-two years, her life was being sustained in her by serum, camphorated oil, morphine, milk and champagne. She was having daily hemorrhages of the lungs.

It was then that she asked to go to Lourdes again on the pilgrimage of March 31, 1937. The nurses and physicians begged her not to go, but she persisted. She wished to go if only to die there. And so on March 28, 1937, in the evening, on the White Train, she left for Lourdes.

On the train she had a hemorrhage of the lungs ; on March 29th when she reached Lourdes she had two hemorrhages. On March 30th and 31st she had three hemorrhages each. She had two baths at the grotto — both followed by hemorrhages. She was being treated with ergot and morphine. On the 30th her condition was so grave that she was given the Last Sacraments.

Wednesday night, the 31st of March, started as all the other nights had started. Her fever was high and she was extremely restless and utterly spent. At three o'clock in the morning she was very low and the nurse touched what she thought to be her dying lips, with Lourdes water. And then a change came over her. Lying balanced between life and death, something inside of her had apparently decided on life. She felt hunger ; asked for food. She slept ; her temperature dropped and in the morning she awoke rested and hungry.

The day passed with no pain, no hemorrhage, very little digestive disturbance, and no fever. She felt rested and had a sense of well-being.

That night she ate normally and slept well.

But she doubted her healing and did not go the next

day (April the 2nd) to the Medical Bureau of Investigation.

It was the physician of the pilgrimage, who, observing her lack of hemorrhages and fever, her good appetite and her sense of well-being, decided to take her to the medical board for examination.

Louise Jamain left Lourdes that night and returned to her hospital. For a week she was re-examined. On February 26th the bacteriological examination had shown tuberculosis ; on April 5th, it did not show tuberculosis. Her general condition was called satisfactory.

In May 1937, she was employed in a printing establishment in Paris. In June 1938, a certificate states that "since she came she has always done well in her work and there are no absences on the salary report."

In July 1938, she presented herself again to the Bureau where she was pronounced to be a well person. She has had no relapse since. (May 1939.)

PART V

THE BOOK OF SAINTS

In August of 1908 a commission was formed to forward the examination of Bernadette's life and character. It was necessary to examine all the people who had known her, who wanted to or were in a position to give any information in regard to her.

It was also necessary to examine the remains of her body, so in September, a year later, the members of the ecclesiastical tribunal, headed by Bishop Gauthey and assisted by two physicians and specially sworn workmen unsealed the vault in which she had been buried. The body was found to be intact and uncorrupted. Her hands crossed on her breast still held the rosary, devoured by rust.

Then the nuns removed the damp clothing and the sawdust mixed with charcoal which surrounded the body, and having washed it, reclothed it in the habit of the order. She was placed in a new coffin lined with white silk, with her head resting on a symbolically embroidered white silk pillow. Again the proceedings were recorded, and sealed with her body which was put back into the vault.

On August 13, 1913, Pope Pius X conferred the title "Venerable" upon her. On June 14, 1925, the ceremony of Beatification took place.

Then, on August 3rd, the nuns removed her body permanently from the vault, placed it in a beautifully designed glass reliquary, and carried it into the convent chapel inside the altar rail of the side altar. There it

lies, guarded by the statue of the Blessed Virgin on the altar above, and by the nuns who keep vigil.

In Rome, on December 8, 1933, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, amidst brilliant illumination and with fanfare of silver trumpets, the name of Bernadette Soubirous was inscribed in the book of Saints.

In the fall of 1937, with the consent of the Mother Superior, Marie-Alphonse, we were led to this chapel by an old, old nun of the order who had known Bernadette and who had been in the convent during her life time. The little chapel, with doors open to the outer court, was filled with praying people. The Sister keeping vigil sat motionless.

It was hard to believe that all of this had happened so recently, that within the life time of the ancient woman standing there, this fragile, waxlike, beautiful figure, in its crystal case delicately touched with gold, had been a bitterly poverty-stricken and humiliated child. She had been called feeble-minded, perjured, and insane ; she had known the terror of the most intense and violent public admiration. She had adjusted herself efficiently to living in a convent and, finally, had found a true solace in the religious life. She lay now, sanctified by the church, having established by her early acts the most enormous pilgrimages in Christian history. In times of persecution, she had restored to the church that she loved, a place of refuge and a fountain of healing.

As Père Cros has said, "What overwhelms, what is so striking — is the infirmity, the smallness, the misery, the ineptitude, the multiple disproportion between this girl and the thing that she has accomplished."

One may still see, today, in the narrow street of the Petits-Fossés, in the shadow of the fortified castle, that

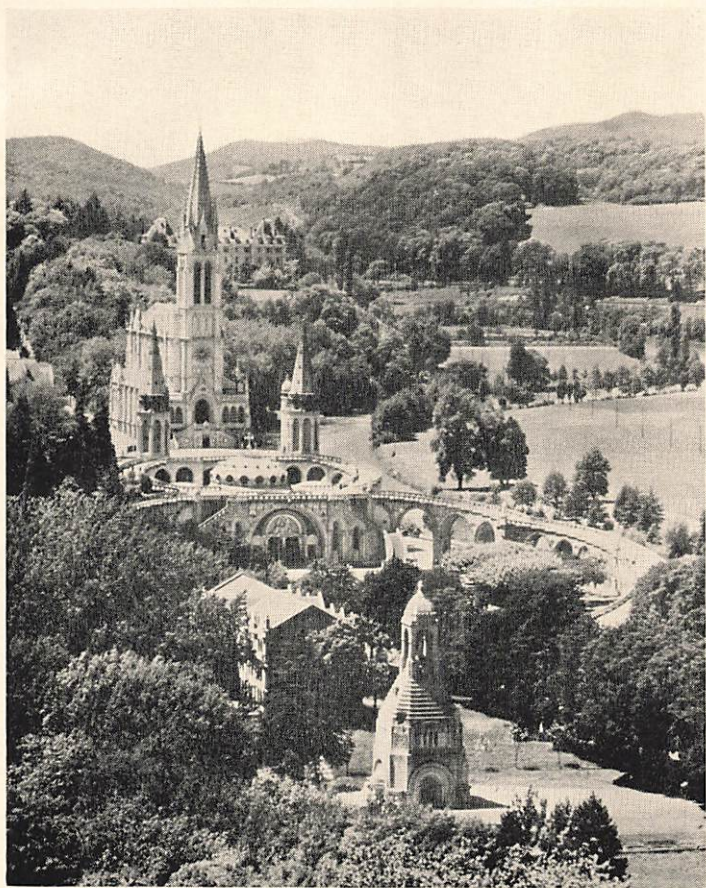
dank little house that contains the discarded prison cell, *le cachot*, in which the family of François Soubirous lived. But *le cachot* is no longer a home; it is a shrine that draws the devotees of Bernadette.

The stone on which Bernadette used to stand to be seen by the people has gone now from the threshold. It is considered sacred and housed appropriately in the Hospice-Convent.

Inside the house the hallway and heavy doors are unchanged. The room itself, with a window reopened, has been made into an altar where stands the statue of Our Lady of All Graces before which Bernadette loved to pray. It was this statue that stood on the right side of the main altar before the old church was destroyed. It was this statue that Bernadette had thought looked a little like her "*petito damizélo*" that first February day.

The paving-stones of the street there are still trenched, still uneven and difficult, but the little old road that led to the Baoûs gate and the Pont-Vieux has disappeared. The Baoûs gate and the Pont-Vieux themselves have gone. New bridges, and broad roads, shop-lined and backed by prosperous hotels, have taken their places.

Great avenues cross the Plain of Savy where the little wood road passed the mill. Paved walks ascend the hillside up which Bernadette climbed so laboriously. The mill-canal through which she waded has been covered with concrete and from somewhere comes the roar of the entrenched waters. The Gave du Pau has been pushed back. The concrete esplanade bears a metal marker near the spot where once she knelt. Above the grotto, the statue, never approved by Bernadette, stands under the little stone arch. The grotto itself has been turned into a votive altar. Everywhere are candles, and the chanting and prayers of the people.



Lourdes Today

Gone are the moss and the flowers. The wild eglandine, uprooted by vandals, has been replaced, but the wild growth of the hillside has given way to formal parking, and the far bank of the river is redressed and replanted.

As happens at shrines, those who try to honor the saints with improvements usually obliterate the saints. But these are only the modern aspects, only transitory. Some day historians will disentangle the ancient remnants and, reconstructing them lovingly, make them live again.

It is easy to see in all of this only tawdriness and exploitation, but before it is condemned one must stand first in the long shadow cast by the Massabielle and see in its cavern and hear in its spring something infinitely older than our civilization. One must watch the long, slow, laborious line file by the rock that is blackened alike by the lips of princes and peasants as they touch the spot hallowed for them by the Mother of God.

The ancient rock and the Grotto are older than Lourdes as Bernadette is older than Lourdes. Many of its people have seen apparitions ; very many of its springs have seen healings. But it is a sound instinct in the people that makes them choose Bernadette to remember and to elevate. It is a sound instinct that makes them know that it is not always the powerful and the mighty who conquer, but sometimes the simple, the disinterested, the tranquil, the candid.

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